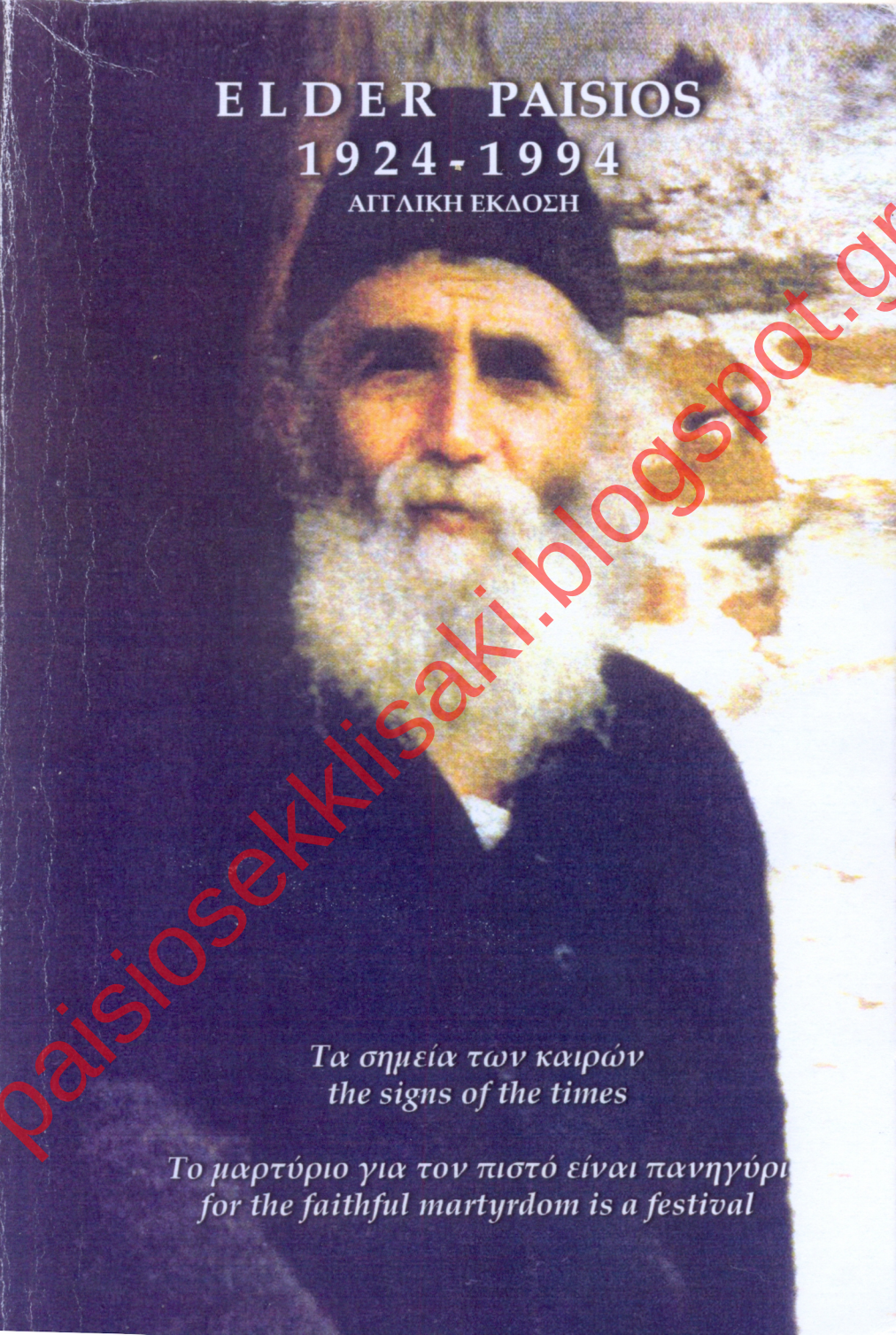
ELDER PAISIOS
1924-1994
ΑΓΓΛΙΚΗ ΕΚΔΟΣΗ



Τα σημεία των καιρών
the signs of the times

Το μαρτύριο για τον πιστό είναι πανηγύρι
for the faithful martyrdom is a festival

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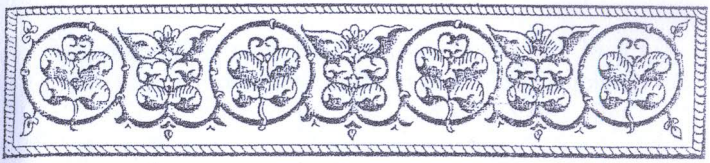

MAVROKEFALOS ANESTIS
MOB.: 6955319555
ALEXANDROUPOLIS

CHAPTER ONE

Τα σημεία των καιρών

The Signs of the Times[1]

CHAPTER FOUR

Το μαρτύριο για τον πιστό είναι πανηγύρι

For the Faithful, Martyrdom Is a Festival

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A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF PAISIOS

Paisios used to be one of the most enlightened Saint figures in our Church, the last decades. He was born in Pharasa of Cappadocia, in the middle east, on 25 July in 1924 and was baptized and named after Arsenios. His Parents, Prodromos and Evlampia Eznepide, were very devout and had ten children while Arsenios had nine siblings. Arsenios even from his infancy, received the blessing from God to be baptized by a Saint who lived in his area, the Saint Arsenios from Cappadocia. Saint Arsenios predicted the future holiness of the child, he asked his Godmother to name after him Arsenios, telling her distinctively that he wanted a monk to be in his stead, namely to have his name. Almost a month after Arsenios' baptism his family followed the road to Greece where he finally stayed in Konitsa. Arsenios since he was a child had a huge love for Christ and our Virgin Mary and he had a strong desire to be a monk. He loved going to the forest holding a wooden cross, he used to pray. At the age of 21 he joined the army, where he excelled in moral and courage. He always asked to go to the front line and to the most dangerous positions, he wished his own death instead of someone's else death. Many times he run the risk of being killed in order to save somebody else, a comrade-in-arms. When he did his military service he went to the Holy Mountain to become a monk. In 1954 he took monastic vows and was named after Averkios, and later on Paisios. He was a monk in the Monastery Esphigmenou and later on in the Monastery Philotheou. As a monk he had an exemplary obedience while he was trying to help the other monks whenever and however he could. From 1958 to 1964 Father Paisios is not in the Holy Mountain, initially in the area of konitsa where he will support thousands of souls and he will help them to escape from the fallacy of the heretic, while later he goes to the isolated and rough Sina, to Saints' Galactionos and Epistimis. In 1964 he returns to the Holy Mountain. His Elder Father Tihonas, many times during Divine service he saw as he himself confessed, the Herouvim and Serapheim to glorify God. The Elder lived for a short time in the skete of Iviron and Katounakia. After the death of his Elder in 1968 he succeeded him in the cell of The Holy Cross. In conclusion, in 1979 he settled down in the Koutloumousiano cell <<Panagouda>>. Little by little his Holy Figure begins to become known to most pilgrims. The whole day, from east til west, he give advices, consoles, banish care, fill your soul with faith, hope and love for God, while at night he reads letters in tens which people sent

them every day and prays to God, being sleepless for people who asked his help.

We heard that the Elder Porfirios (Malakasa), in his great mortification had said the following, for the Elder Paisios: f. Paisios' Grace has greater worth because he acquired it by a hard-fought struggle, while God gave it to me as a gift when I was young in order to help people in need...Saints like f. Paisios are sent to earth by God every 400 years!!!...

In the Holly mountain he led an ascetic's life and he spent there the most years of his life. The gifts that God embellished him with are many. He had the gift of healing (he cured a lot of people of a variety of illnesses, cancers, paralytics from birth and more.), he had the gift of against evil spirits (he cured many, exorcising evil spirits from people who were given a rough time) , he had the gift of prediction (he said to many people facts that will happen in the future in a personal level but he also prophesied of future events of our country to come) , he had the gift of far-sightedness (he knew someone's heart deeply and purely than the man himself, that's why he gave advices to a nicety and properly and everyone listened to the word he needed to hear), he had the gift of distinction in spirits (he knew to a nicety if a spiritual occurrence was by God or by evil that tried to deceive and mislead), he had distinction(he knew in any case which one was God's will and if he had to reveal it or not. He knew which one was good, right in any case. Even for non spiritual matters).

He had the gift of divinity. From many spiritual experiences he had with Saints, with Angels, with Virgin Mary but also with visions of the unbuilt light, in fact, he became a theologian and knew deeply the Sacraments of God.

These gifts and above all the elder's love, brought people close to him. Hundreds of people visited him in his cell every day. Endless comings and goings. The elder took the pain, the anxiety and the problems from people and gave them back a solution, joy and peace. Wherever it was worthy-he knew and God where and when-intervened miraculously, under God's rule, and solved the unsolved.

The elder Paisios was a gift by God to people. All this reputation was spread by word of mouth, by people who were surprised by his many kindnesses and his wonders... The Elder Paisios was brought out by God Himself.

Thousands were the letters which were sent. The Elder said:<<...or psychological problems or cancer or separated family...one of these three will be the problems...these problems give people a rough time...these kind of things they write to me>>. The Elder felt pain either in person or through letters and took it up self-sacrificed willingly... his heart went out to other people because he loved them. He didn't want and couldn't keep himself aloof when other people suffered. If it was possible he took up people's cross on his shoulder, in order to release them from their cross.

The Elder, while he was curing other people, he didn't asked God to cure him...He wanted to be patient with illnesses. << to make some spiritual money for the old age>> he said amusingly.

The Elder had many illnesses and endured them with bravery and fighting spirit. He felt contempt for pain and laughed at it!...

In 12 July 1994 The Elder Paisios consign his Holy soul peacefully and humbly to The Lord, Who loved so much and served Him since he was young. He was buried in the yard of the hermitage of Saint John the Theologian in Souroti of Thessaloniki.

After his death, The Elder Paisios continues to do wonders. We hope to become known the miraculous events that happened and continue to happen after his death, to glorify God and the faithful to gain advantage from it, but also for the mistrustful who see the words of God to be fulfilled two thousand years ago:<<Whoever believes in me won't die>> and <<Whoever believes in me, ...>>.

So, The elder as faithful servant of Christ, didn't die but lives and does wonders!
May we all have his blessings!

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CHAPTER ONE

Τα σημεία των καιρών

The Signs of the Times[1]

The Antichrist

Geronda, tell us something about the Antichrist.

– Let us for once say something about Christ... We must be as close to Christ as we can. Will we be afraid of the Antichrist if we are united with Christ? Isn't the antichrist spirit present today? One way or another, evil is done by the antichrist spirit. And even if an antichrist monster is created to do some horrible things, in the end he will be ridiculed. But many events will take place. Perhaps you, too, will live to see many of the signs written in the Book of Revelation. Gradually some of these signs are emerging. I have been speaking out for so many years now. The situation is terrible, unimaginable! The foolishness has exceeded all boundaries. Apostasy is here, and now *the son of perdition*[2] is expected to come. It will be a madhouse. In the prevailing turmoil, every

1. Whatever is written in this chapter has been said or written between the years 1981-1994.

2. 2 Thess 2:3.

nation will rise up to do whatever it wants. May God put out His hand so the interests of the great powers will be such that they might be helpful. Every so often we will hear of something new. We will see the most incredible things, the most irrational things happening. But these events will occur and pass quickly.

Ecumenism, the European Union, one huge nation, one religion made to fit – these are the schemes of the devil. The Zionists are preparing someone to be the Messiah. For them the Messiah is a king who will reign here on earth. The Jehovah's Witnesses are also looking toward an earthly king. The Zionists will present someone and the Jehovah's Witnesses will accept him. They will say, "He is the one." There will be great confusion. In that confusion, everyone will be looking for a Messiah to save them. And then they will present some who will say, "I am the Imam, I am the fifth Buddha, I am the Christ expected by the Christians, I am the one expected by the Jehovah's Witnesses, I am the Messiah of the Jews." He will have five "selves"...

When John the Evangelist says in the First Epistle, *Little children ... as you heard that Antichrist cometh, even now have there arisen many antichrists...*,[3] he does not mean that the anticipated Antichrist will be like the persecutors Maximinian or Diocletian. Rather, the anticipated Antichrist will, in some manner, be the incarnate devil, who will present himself to the Jewish nation as the Messiah and will mislead the world. Difficult years are ahead; we will be tested very severely. The Christians will suffer great persecution. And, you see, people are not at

3. 1 Jn 2:18.

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all aware that we are living during the signs of the times, that the sealing is already advancing. It is as if nothing is happening. This is why the Sacred Scripture says that even the elect will be deceived.[4] Those without a good disposition will not be enlightened and will be misled during the years of apostasy. For whoever does not have divine Grace, does not have spiritual clarity, just like the devil.

– Geronda, do the Zionists believe what is said about the Antichrist?

– They would like to govern the whole world. To achieve their goal, they will use even sorcery and satanism. They see the worship of Satan as a power that will help them achieve their goals. They will seek to govern the world with satanic power. They do not consider God in their schemes. But will they be blessed by God in their efforts? God will bring a lot of good out of this situation. Some other satanic theories at least held sway for about seventy years; but they won't even last for seven years.

– Geronda, when I hear about the Antichrist, I feel a fear inside of me.

– What do you fear? Will he be more terrible than the devil? He is a man after all. Saint Marina used to beat the devil, and Saint Justina dispelled so many demons. After all, we didn't come in this world to have an easy life.

The Earthly King of the Jews

A sign marking the fulfilment of the prophecies will be the destruction of the mosque of Omar in Jerusalem. They will tear it down to rebuild the Temple of Solomon,

4. Cf. Mt 24:24; Mk 13:22.

which, as they say, was built on that site. Ultimately the Zionists will install the Antichrist there as the Messiah. I have heard that the Jews are already preparing to rebuild the Temple of Solomon.

– Geronda, how is it that Jews read the Old Testament but do not believe in Christ?

– Why don't you go and ask the Jews? The Jews were always fanatical. They do understand, but it is their egoism that blinds them. If they only had paid a little attention to the Sacred Scripture, no one would remain a Jew.

– How did they interpret what they read?

– Indeed, how did they and how do they interpret Sacred Scripture! They turn spiritual meanings into material ones. For example, you should see how they interpret Prophet Isaiah's *the desert shall blossom*.[5] In order to show that the desert has indeed blossomed, they altered the course of a stream, built irrigation systems, planted gardens, banana trees, lemon trees, orange trees, they created orchards and gardens everywhere so they can say, *The desert has blossomed*! That is how they interpret everything. But the words of the Prophet actually refer to the spiritual renewal of the world through the Holy Spirit, through the Baptism of regeneration.

– Are they now expecting the earthly king?

– Yes, the Antichrist. The Rabbis know that the Messiah has already come and that they have crucified Him. I have learned from a person that when a Jew is dying, the Rabbi goes and whispers in his ear, "The Messiah has come." You see, their conscience seems to trouble them by a sense of culpability, and yet they do not humble themselves.

5. Isa 35:1-2.

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– And what do they gain by saying that to the dying?

– Nothing. They just say it because their conscience is troubling them and they think that by saying it to the dying they will be all right.

– And other people don't hear this?

– No, it is whispered in the ear. The Jewish youth have revolted against the Rabbis. "The Messiah has come," they say, "what Messiah are you waiting for?" In America there is a group of young Jews who study Sacred Scripture historically and publish a journal in which they write, "The Messiah has come. We will send this journal free of charge to whoever doesn't believe that the Messiah has come, until they do believe. Whoever believes should send us their subscription fee to help us send the journal to others so they will also believe."

– Are these people Jews?

– Yes, they are Jews.

– Have they become Christians?

– Well, for now it suffices that they have believed the Messiah has come.

– Can it be that there are Rabbis who are crypto-Christians?

– Rabbis who are crypto-Christians? Can any one who has become a Christian remain a Rabbi? That is, a Rabbi who teaches his fellow Jews that the Messiah has not yet come and, when they are dying, to whisper in their ear that the Messiah has come?

The 666 seal

– Geronda, how soon will these events take place?

– They are delayed because of you and because of me,

so we may be able to acquire a good spiritual state. God is being patient, because if they were to occur now you and I would be lost. Nowhere in the teaching of Christ is there a specific reference to time.[6] However, Sacred Scripture does say that the signs of the times will warn us of their coming.[7] We must always be ready and shall see them when the time nears. Then we will be more certain. *Time and experience will reveal (the events) to those who are vigilant.*[8]

A book came to my attention, which had on its cover three large sixes! This was done to present the six nicely and to familiarize people with it. In time, little by little, the seal will come as well.

– Geronda, even the fasteners sown on clothes are sold in packages that bear the number 666.

– That devil is at work everywhere! That number has been on credit cards for some time. Now it is on the fasteners! Many use the 666 as a trademark to sell more of their products. One supports the other. In other words, one 666 company will prefer another 666 company. It has been written that when the depiction of a snake biting its tail is published, this will mean that the Jews have taken control of the world. For now, they have put it on a few currency bills. The number 666 has already been a hit in China, in India!

– Geronda, how do people know about using this number?

– Saint John the Evangelist knew what the devil was

6. Cf. Mt 24:36; Mk 13:32; Acts 1:7; 1 Thess 5:1.

7. Cf. Mt 24:29 f.; Mk 13:24 f.; Lk 21:25 f.

8. Saint Andrew Archbishop of Caesarea, *Interpretation of the Revelation of Saint John the Apostle, Evangelist and Theologian*, ch. 38, P. G. 106:340C.

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planning to do, just as the Prophets foretold that Christ would be betrayed for *thirty pieces of silver*,[9] that He would be given vinegar to drink,[10] that His garments would be divided.[11] Two thousand years ago he wrote in the Book of Revelation that people would be marked with the number 666. *He that hath understanding, let him count the number of the beast; for it is a number of a man; and his number is six hundred and sixty and six.*[12] For the Jews the number 666 is a symbol of economy. As mentioned in the Old Testament, the Israelites imposed a specific tax upon the people they conquered through various wars. The annual amount of the tax was 666 talents of gold.[13] Now, to subdue the whole world, they are again imposing this taxation number, which is connected with their glorious past. That's why they don't want to replace it with another number. In other words, the number 666 is the symbol of Mammon. They borrowed it from the weights of gold – not knowing what Saint John says about it in the Book of Revelation – but, nevertheless, it still refers to Mammon. The Gospel says it clearly: Either Christ or Mammon. *You cannot serve God and Mammon.*[14]

Events are progressing accordingly. In America, marked dogs transmit a signal and can be located in no time at all wherever they might be. So they know where each dog is at. Dogs that do not have an identifying mark,

9. Cf. Zech 11:1-13.
10. Cf. Ps 69:21 (Ps 68:22 LXX).
11. Cf. Ps 22:18 (Ps 21:19 LXX).
12. Rev 13:18.
13. Cf. 1 Kg 10:14; 2 Chr 9:13.
14. Mt 6:24.

and are found without an owner are killed by laser. Late they'll start killing people, too.

Tons of fish have been marked and are being observe through satellites to study their migration patterns. An now a vaccine has been developed to combat a new dis ease, which will be obligatory and those taking it wil be marked. Many people there are already marked with some sort of laser beam, on the forehead, on the arm. Later on, anyone who is not marked with the number 666 will not be able to either buy or sell, to get a loan, to get a job, and so forth. My thinking tells me that this is the system through which the Antichrist has chosen to take over the whole world, and people who are not part of this system won't be able to find work and so on, – whether black or white or red; in other words, everyone he will take over through an economic system that controls the global economy, and only those who have accepted the seal, the mark of the number 666, will be able to participate in business dealings.

But what will become of the people who are sealed! An expert was telling me that laser beams are harmful to people. People who are marked will attract the rays of the sun and suffer such harm that they will gnaw their tongues in pain.[15] Those who are not sealed will have a better fate than the others, because Christ will help those who are not sealed. And this is no small matter.

– Geronda, when will Christ help them? Later?

– No, right then.

– Geronda, if they are not able to buy and sell, how will they be better off?

15. Cf. Rev 16:10.

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– You see, God has a way, and I know something about it. Well, this matter has preoccupied me a great deal and then He sent me the ... telegram. Oh how God provides for us indeed!

– Geronda, why is the seal also called an inscription or engraving?

– Because the seal will not be superficial. What does "engraving" mean? Does it not mean deeply incised straight lines? The seal will be a slash, placed first on all the products and then in time, with laser beams, it will be enforced on people, too, on their hand or their forehead. Two years ago I spoke with a doctor from Toronto about this sealing and now he tells me that, according to a newspaper article he read, instead of an ID card, they will require some sort of impression on the hand.[16] Things are progressing, but we cannot exactly say that this or that will be done.

Again, certain television sets, which have recently been imported into Greece, have a component, which can observe those watching the television. Soon those who have a television will be watching their television, and, at the same time, they themselves will be watched! That is, those watching will be watched. Their whole life, what they say, what they do, everything, will be monitored through computers. Do you see what a dictatorship the devil has devised! In Brussels, there is an entire building with the 666, where they house the computer. That computer can monitor billions of people – the entire population of the world is approximately six billion. Confession for everyone at the push of a button! Some Europeans

16. The Elder is referring to the technology of palm-scanning.

have resisted these developments because they fear a global dictatorship. We, the Orthodox Christians, resist these developments, because we do not want the Antichrist – nor the dictatorship, of course. Serious events are awaiting us, but they will not stand for long. Just as Orthodox Christianity was not wiped out by Communism and other enemies in the past, so it will not be wiped out now.

The New ID Cards

– Geronda, someone said, "We use the five-thousand drachma currency note which bears the number 666, don't we? It's just going to be the same with the new identification cards."

– The five-thousand drachma note is currency – and the English gold sovereign bears the image of Queen Victoria; this doesn't bother me. *Render therefore unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's.*[17] But this is about my identification card. It is something personal; it is not a mere currency note. Identification means what the word says: a person is identified personally by what that card states. The card contains the devil and I sign that I accept it. How can I do that?

– Geronda, what is the relationship between the ID card and the seal?

– The ID card is not the seal; it is the introduction to the seal.

– Geronda, people are asking what to do about the new ID cards.

– When people ask you, it is better to advise them to

17. Mt 22:21; Mk 12:17.

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consult with their Spiritual Fathers and to be patient until we see how the Church responds to this matter. Many are asking questions, but few understand the answers. Since I have written about this clearly in the pamphlet *The Signs of the Times*, let each act according to his conscience. A few people have said of course, "Well, that is the opinion of one monk; it is not the Church's position." But I did not express my own opinion; I simply stated the words of Christ, of the Gospel, because our opinion must be subject to the will of God as recorded in the Gospel. Others, who say the opposite of what I said, claim that Father Paisios said it. Still others who hear such things, seeing that they are such very serious matters, do not bother to ask if that is what I really said, but just believe whatever they hear. I am not afraid to speak the truth openly. Some people come to my *Kalyvi* and throw sixes in the box. That is nothing, after all. But once they threw a sign outside my door. I thought someone had come and not found me and had written a sign, "He's out," so others would see it. Then I looked and saw the most abusive words, which I had not heard even as a layman. This whole present situation will be swept away, but first we will go through stormy times. People are roused and we, too, must rise up with much prayer.

Some people are concerned over the matter of the ID cards, while others are exploiting the issue in order to create problems. The Church must take a correct position. She must speak out and explain to the faithful so that they will understand that, if they accept the new ID, it will amount to a spiritual fall. The Church must also ask the State to at least not make the new ID cards obligatory. If the Church takes a serious position, and the State respects the freedom of choice of the faithful, then whoever

wants can have a new ID card, and those who want to keep the old one can do so. In this case, the strong-willed who keep the old card will have to endure the abuse of the many who will oppose them. Most people will just go about their business. Those who wish to be served will have the new cards, and the other poor people, the devout, will have the old identification card and will have to endure hardships.

Now that the minister has promised not to place the 666 on the new ID cards, visibly or invisibly, that, too, is something. We'll be patient and things will clear up in time. It is something even to say that they will not put the 666 on the cards. They themselves deny it, but we'll see what they do in the end. By the time the new ID cards come out, it is entirely possible that we may have the wrath of God upon us. After all, it is not likely that everyone will have to have a new ID card within twenty-four hours. Let's wait to see the first ones that come out. They will be examined, and if the minister reneges on his word, then the struggle will be a righteous one. If we continue the demonstrations now, they will claim, "Look, they are shouting and creating trouble without reason." A dog, if it is a good guard dog, will bark when the thief comes. When the thief leaves, the dog stops barking. If it continues to bark, then it is not a good guard dog.

– Geronda, it was also said by the authorities that since we have religious tolerance in our country, the religion of each person should not be written on the new ID cards.

– Yes, this does not interest them, but it certainly interests me, because this is what identifies me. The card must state where I am from and what I am. If religion is not included in the card there will be problems. For example,

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someone will go to the town hall for a marriage license. If his ID card says "Orthodox" – regardless of how good a Christian he really is – then it will be alright. But if it does not state the religion, how can they give out a marriage license? For the Church this will become a complicated issue. Now, if religion is stated on an optional basis, this would also be a sort of confession. Europe is Europe. Here things are different.

The Insidious Way of Introducing the Seal

Little by little, after the credit card and the ID card, that is, after the personal "record" of each person, they will proceed insidiously to the seal. Through various cunning means, they will compel people to accept the seal on the forehead or on the arm. They will force the issue and say, "You can only use the card; currency will be abolished." People will give their card to the stores to buy what they need, and the merchant will get his money from the bank. Whoever does not have a card will not be able to buy or sell. On the other hand, they will begin promoting "the other more perfect system" by marking every person with the 666, using laser beams on the forehead or the arm, which will not be visible on the outside. At the same time, they will show on television that so and so stole the card of so and so and took all his money from the bank. And then they will add, "The most secure system is to have the seal on our forehead or arm with a laser beam, because only the bearer of this seal will know his or her own personal number. Sealing is the most secure system. No one can take our head or our arm, nor will anybody be able to see the seal embedded in us." That's

why they let thieves and other criminals to rampage. Fifteen monastic cells were robbed near Karyes. One person was killed while being robbed. So, people will find an opportunity to violate laws and traditions and take whatever they want. Let us say, for example, that someone wants to encroach on somebody's field and claims that it once belonged to his grandfather who had rented it to some shepherds as a pasture for their sheep, and you cannot verify this. Then, the authorities will say, "Unfortunately, as it is, we cannot check the facts; we can only do this with the computer." And then they will proceed with the sealing. The computer will then do the search to find out whether or not someone is or is not marked and sealed so they can be helped with their problem or not.

The three and a half years[18] will be difficult, during which the few who do not agree with this system will endure hardships. Some excuse will be discovered to throw these people in jail. After a year, they will be taken to another city for questioning and more legal proceedings, going from one city to another. Finally the authorities will say, "We're sorry, you are innocent after all. If only you had been sealed, we would have been able to gather the necessary information in a minute. Now we cannot check the facts."

– Geronda, will they be able to impose the seal on everybody by force?

– They are too "refined" to do that! They'll be courteous about it – after all, they are Europeans! They will display some superiority. They won't torture people but anyone

18. Cf. Dan 9:27; Rev 12:6 and 13:5. See also Saint Irenaeus Lugdunensis, *Adversus haereses*, book 5, Sources Chrétiennes 153, Paris 1969, p. 323 and 387.

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who is not sealed will simply not be able to live normally in society. They will then again say, "Your troubles come from not being sealed; if you accept the seal, you will not have these difficulties." If any one happens to have gold sovereigns or dollars, he will not be able to use them. So if you can now learn to live simply and frugally, you will be able to get through those difficult years. It will be helpful to have a small field, to cultivate some wheat or potatoes; to have a few olive trees, and then with some farm animals, a goat, a few chickens you will be able to provide for the needs of your family. For even if you were to stockpile various groceries, this would not do because such foods do not keep; they spoil quickly. Naturally, these difficult times will be short, three to three and a half years.[19] The time will be shortened for the sake of the elect.[20] They will not realize how quickly the time will pass. God will not leave man without help.

– Geronda, will Christ intervene during these difficult years?

– Yes. The Saints, *Panaghia*, Christ will appear to save even one wronged man with a good disposition, because he deserves divine help, and even more so when the whole world will be going through such a difficult time. Now it will be a passing storm, a short occupation by the Antichrist Satan. He will then be given such a slap by Christ, all the nations will be shaken up and then peace will prevail in the world for a long time. During this time, Christ will provide the opportunity for His creation to be saved. Is Christ going to abandon His creation? No, He

19. *Ibid.* (see note 18).
20. Cf. Mt 24:22; Mk 13:20.

will appear when mankind has reached an impasse and will save it from the clutches of the Antichrist. People will return to Christ and a spiritual serenity will prevail over all the earth for many years. Some people associate the Second Coming of Christ with this intervention of His. My thinking tells me that this will not be the Second Coming of Christ when He comes as Judge, but only an intervention of Christ, for there are so many events that have not taken place.

Christ will intervene, slap down this whole system, prevail over all evil and transform it into good in the end. The roads will be filled with many shrines of devotion. The buses will have Icons on their billboards. All the people will believe, and will want you to tell them about Jesus Christ! Thus the Gospel will be proclaimed throughout the whole world,[21] and then Christ will come as Judge to judge the world. Judgment is one thing and intervention to help His creation is another.

Sealing Equals Denial

While the Evangelist John clearly refers to the ingrained seal in the Book of Revelation,[22] some people just do not understand. What can you tell them? Unfortunately, one hears so many foolish ideas of the brain from certain "Gnostics" of the day. One says, "I will accept the ID card with the number 666 and will place a cross on it." Another says, "I will accept the seal on the forehead but will put a cross on my forehead as well" and so many

21. Cf. Mt 24:14; Mk 13:10.
22. Cf. Rev 13:16 f., 14:9 f., 16:2, 20:4.

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other similar foolish notions. They think that such things sanctify, when in fact they are spiritual errors.

A bishop told me, "Next to the spot where I will sign my name, I will also put the sign of the cross. I am not denying Christ, I am only trying to serve my needs." I told him, "You being a bishop, it's alright for you to sign your name with a cross, and he, being an archimandrite priest, can also sign his name with a cross; but what will the poor people do?" What is unclean cannot be sanctified. Clean water is receptive of Grace and is sanctified. Urine cannot become holy water. A stone may be turned into bread through a miracle. But an unclean thing is not receptive of sanctification. As such, the devil, Antichrist, when he is on our ID card or on our forehead or our arm with his symbol, cannot be sanctified by placing a cross there. We have the power of the Precious Cross, the Holy Symbol, the divine Grace of Christ, and only when we preserve the Grace of our Holy Baptism, through which we deny Satan, are we united to Christ and receive the Holy Seal, *The Seal of the Gift of the Holy Spirit*. Do you see how they are trying to proceed with rational thinking ... put a cross next to their name and everything will be all right! And while we see that the Apostle Peter externally denied Christ, and this, too, was a denial,[23] these rationalists deny the Holy Seal of Christ which was given to them in Holy Baptism, by accepting the seal of the Antichrist and even claiming that they still have Christ in them!!

– Geronda, what happens if someone accepts the seal out of ignorance?

– It will be out of indifference, not ignorance. How can

23. Cf. Mt 26:69-75; Mk 14:66-72; Lk 22:54-62; Jn 18:16-18, 25-27.

there be ignorance when things are so clear? And even if someone does not know, he must be interested to find out and to learn. If we claim that we did not know and for this reason accepted the seal, then Christ will tell us sternly, O *ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky, but can ye not discern the signs of the times?*[24] When even out of ignorance someone receives the sign, he loses the divine Grace and receives the influence of demonic energy. You see, when the child is immersed in the baptismal water by the priest during Holy Baptism, he receives the Holy Spirit without knowing it, and divine Grace dwells in him from then on.

Interpreting the Prophecies

– Geronda, some people say, "Whatever is written by God, that is what will happen. Why then should we be concerned?"

– Yes, they say that, my child, but it is not how it is! I, too, hear some people saying, "The Jews are not such fools as to be betrayed by the 666, when the Evangelist John writes about it in the Book of Revelation. If they were, they would have done it in a smarter, more secretive manner." But can we say that the Scribes and Pharisees did not know the Old Testament? Didn't Annas and Caiaphas know better than anyone that in the Old Testament it was written that the Messiah would be betrayed for *thirty pieces of silver*?[25] Why didn't they ask for thirty-one or twenty-nine and instead asked for "thirty"? But they

24. Mt 16:3.
25. Cf. Zech 11:11-13.

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were blind. God knew that things would happen in this way. God foreknows but does not predestine – only the Turks believe in what is written, in kismet. God knows that something will happen in a particular way, but man still does it out of his foolishness. It is not a matter of God having made a specific decision, but He sees the evil deeds of men and where it will lead them, and knows that their minds will not change. Again, it is not a matter of God arranging things to happen in a particular manner.

Other people are preoccupied with prophecies and devise their own interpretation. They do not say, at least, "This is my opinion about this matter," but they state unequivocally, "This is how it is," and then go on to relate many theories of their own. Some will interpret the prophecies to their liking in order to justify their passions. An example of this is the statement made by Saint Cyril, *It would be better if the signs of the Antichrist did not take place in our times*.[26] Someone who wants to justify himself, his cowardice, will say, "Ah, you see? Saint Cyril was afraid he might deny Christ if he had to face the dangers of the Antichrist; am I any better than Saint Cyril? Therefore, even if I should deny Christ under such conditions, it is of no consequence..." Of course, Saint Cyril said that the events should not happen so that his eyes would not see the Antichrist, and not that he was afraid of him. Do you see what the devil can do?

Again certain "Gnostics", unfortunately, wrap up their spiritual children with swaddling-bands as if they were infants, presumably to protect them from worrying. "This

26. Saint Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catecheses, Catechism 15, For the Enlightened,* ch. 18, ed. Etoimasia, Kareas 1991, p. 319.

does not matter; that is not important. As long as you believe inside..." Or they may advise them, "Do not talk about this subject – about the ID cards, the seal –, so as not to upset people." On the contrary, if they tell them "Let's try to live more spiritually; let's be close to Christ don't be afraid of anything; and in the final reckoning we'll go as true witnesses and martyrs," then at least they will be better prepared. When we know the truth, we are given the opportunity to be troubled, to ask questions. We are pained by the present condition, we pray more fervently, and we are careful not to fall into a spiritual trap.

But now what? Besides giving their own interpretations, some are also fearful like worldly people, when these spiritual teachers should be troubled spiritually over the situation and should be helping the Christians by instilling in them a positive concern and by strengthening their faith to find divine consolation. I ask myself: are they not troubled by all these events which are taking place in our society and in our time? Why don't they put even one question mark against the interpretations of their mind? And if they themselves render indirect assistance to the Antichrist regarding the seal, how can they mislead other souls toward perdition? When Sacred Scripture says, *To lead astray, if possible, the elect*,[27] it means that the people who try to interpret these matters with their own mind can readily go astray into error.

Therefore behind the perfect system of "the service card", the security computer, the sinister global dictatorship is lurking, the Antichrist's slavery. *And he causeth*

27. Mk 13:22.

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all, the small and the great, and the rich and the poor, and the free and the bond, that there be given them a mark on their right hand, or upon their forehead; and that no man should be able to buy or to sell, save he that hath the mark, even the name of the beast or the number of his name. Here is wisdom: He that hath understanding, let him count the number of the beast; for it is the number of a man; and his number is six hundred and sixty and six.[28]

28. Rev 13:16-18.

CHAPTER FOUR

Το μαρτύριο για τον πιστό είναι πανηγύρι

For the Faithful, Martyrdom Is a Festival

Some Must Fall to Save the Situation

Difficult years!... We will go through a difficult jolting. Do you know what it means to be jolted? If you are not somewhat spiritual, you will not be able to endure. God forbid, but we will even reach the point of denying our faith. Seek to be united in fellowship, live spiritually, be anchored to Christ. If you are anchored to Christ, you will fear neither demons nor torments. People in the world have many pressures and fears from all sides. But when one is close to Christ, what is there to fear? Do you remember Saint Kyrikos?[1] He was only three years old and, when the tyrant attempted to instruct him, he gave him a kick. Read the lives of the Saints. These texts (*Synaxaria*) are very helpful because they connect us to the Saints and ignite in us devotion and a desire for sacrifice.

This life is not meant to be one of ease and comfort. We're going to die anyway, so we might as well die properly. Since we're not doing anything else, may God

1. His memory is celebrated on July 15.

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grant us a martyrdom – wouldn't that be good? One day a *bourdounaris*[2] came to my *Kalyvi* in tears and told me, "Don't stay alone tonight. They're planning to kill you." "Who?" I asked. "There's five or six of them," he said. He was accompanying five or six atheists. Who knows what plans they had for the Holy Mountain. They took him for a fool and spoke openly in front of him. As soon as he heard it, he came to tell me.

That night, as I was going to bed, I heard a slight rattle, like a little bell on a dog. I looked through the window and saw three young men. "Open the door, old man," they shouted. But I answered, "What are young men like you doing wandering around at night? Don't you have any brains? You'll look suspicious! Some others were taken to jail. I have no appetite for conversation at this time of night." "Should we come tomorrow?" they asked. "Come tomorrow any time you want, and if I can I will see you," I reassured them. After I sent them away, I noticed that the light of their flashlight was not moving. They had stopped a little further up the hill. I got up, got dressed, put on my monastic Habit and waited for them, feeling all the while an inner peacefulness. The next day three groups of three men came to visit, but none of them were the three of the night before. Of course, they know that they won't find money on me, because I don't have any. They come and argue with me only about spiritual matters.

Another time, a very large man who had a body like a gorilla came to my *Kalyvi* and sat down quietly to one side. I was saying to a group of people, "You're only good

2. From the Latin word burdo-onis (a young mule) meaning the stable keeper or more specifically the guardian of the mules.

for parades, not battles. Christ sacrificed Himself. We have Orthodox Christianity, with martyred Saints who are still helping us. If they had not died for the faith, who knows what we would be now." All of this talk seemed to have enraged him. People came and went, but he stayed off to the side. He seemed very intent. There was a coldness. Finally, the last of the people left. So I told him, "It's dark now, where will you go?" "I'm not concerned about that," he said. "But it concerns me – off you go," I retorted. Then he lunged at me and grabbed me by the throat. "You and your gods!" he said. When I heard him saying "your gods", I felt as if he was cursing God. What, am I a pagan to him? So I told him boldly, "What gods, you godless man? I worship the Triune God. Go, get out of here!" And with that, I gave him a push and he fell to the ground and rolled up. How he got out through the gate I don't know. After this, I thought to myself, "If I were to be hanged upside down to be tortured, this would at least help put the hernia[3] back in its place!" That fellow had stayed to the end with evil intentions, since he grabbed my throat and tried to choke me to death.

Whoever Is Determined to Die Fears Nothing

Today, for one to be able to face the difficulties he encounters, he must have Christ in his heart, from Whom he will receive divine consolation in order to have the sense of self-sacrifice. Otherwise, what is going to happen at a

3. The incident occurred in 1987 when the Elder was suffering from a hernia.

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difficult moment? I read somewhere that Abdul Pasha[4] had taken five hundred young men from the Holy Mountain. Some of them were novices and some had gone there to hide. It seems that back then during the Greek Revolution, people took refuge on the Holy Mountain, because the Turks rounded up young boys to turn them into Janissaries. Of the young men Abdul Pasha gathered, those who did not deny Christ he would hang from the Tower at Ouranoupolis. Of those he gathered on the Holy Mountain only five were martyred, while the others denied Christ and became Janissaries. It takes bravery; it is not a trifling matter. If one has wretchedness and selfishness in his heart, he cannot have divine power, and then, how can he to face such a situation?

I was impressed by what one of the bishops of the Patriarchate said to me. I had previously noted, "What are we coming to? On the one hand, we have Ecumenism, on the other hand we have Zionism, and now satanism! Soon we'll be bowing to the devil with his two horns instead of to the two-headed eagle." Then he told me, "Today it is rare to find a bishop like the Bishop of Caesarea Paisios II."[5] What did Paisios II do? Well, he used to go to the Sultan to petition about his affairs while wearing a sturdy piece of rope around his waist, as he was determined and ready to be hanged by the Turks. It was as if he was suggesting to the Sultan, "Don't bother to look for a rope and

4. Mehmet Emin Abdoulah Pasha was the governor of Thessaloniki during the years 1821-1823.

5. Metropolitan of Caesarea born in Pharasa of Cappadocia in 1777. He studied at the Flavianon Theological School of Saint John the Prophet and Forerunner and later in Constantinople, where he was ordained deacon and priest. Ordained Metropolitan of Caesarea in 1832 he struggled boldly to save Hellenism in his eparchy.

delay; if you're going to hang me, here, I have the rope ready!" For the difficult issues of the Church he was the one sent to the Sultan. Many times he saved the Patriarchate from dangerous situations. In his old age, he would be taken to Constantinople on horseback in a large basket, with a counter weight on the opposite side of the horse.

Once the Turks had issued an order calling on Greeks to serve in the Turkish Army. Christians had a hard time serving together with Turks, because they could not carry out their religious duties. In the meantime, the Russians had asked the Turks not to prevent the Greeks from observing their religious duties. The Patriarch called upon Paisios and sent him to the Sultan. He then appeared before the Sultan again wearing the rope around his waist. The Sultan told him the Greeks must be conscripted to serve the country. Then Paisios told him, "Yes, I, too, agree that the Greeks should be conscripted to serve; after all, these lands belonged to them from long ago. But because we have a different religion, they must be placed in a separate army with their own officers, so they can observe their religious duties. You know that they cannot say their prayers together with your people; to have you observing Ramadan[6] and we the Epiphany!" The Sultan began to think to himself, "The Christians armed? This is dangerous." Then he answered, "No, no, it is better if the Greeks are not conscripted."

On another occasion, the Armenians had asked the Sultan to grant to them the Baloukli and were successful

6. The ninth month of the Islamic calendar year, during which the faithful Muslims observe a strict fast (total abstinence of food, drink, smoking, and so on) from morning to night every day. The restrictions do not apply during the period from sunset to sunrise.

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in getting his approval. Later, Paisios went to the Sultan to discuss this matter. The Sultan noted, "The Baloukli once belonged to the ancestors of the Armenians and they should have it." Then Paisios agreed with him, "Yes, they should have it, because, when we know that an area once belonged to our ancestors, we should take it. Give me a document to sign with you about the Baloukli, for I have come as a representative of the Patriarchate." He signed too. Then he took out a Constantinian florin[7] and said, "The Armenians should have Baloukli, but then we should have Haghia Sophia, for it is ours; it belongs to our ancestors, and you must give it to us!" And he showed the Constantinian florin. Paisios was accompanied by a Russian officer, who had arrived in the City by ship, to serve as a witness. At that moment, the Sultan found himself in a dilemma and rescinded his decision about the Baloukli. "No, no, the Baloukli is yours," the Sultan relented. The Sultan had to either rescind his decision about the Baloukli or else grant Haghia Sophia to the Greeks.

You see how Paisios was so effective in turning them around? And he was able to do this because he was fully prepared to die. If one has not made the decision about death and is not prepared to die, nothing can be achieved. It all starts from there.

Denial of the Faith Was Redeemed by Martyrdom

Today most people would prefer that others get the snake out of its hole. Fine, but if they are unwilling to

7. A gold coin depicting Saints Constantine and Helen worn as an ornament or as a phylakton.

get it out, at least they could give a warning, "Be careful, there may be a snake in that hole." This way one can approach an issue with some degree of caution and preparedness. But even this is not done. If we had lived in the times of the Martyrs, given the rationality we have, we would probably say, "I only deny God externally, not internally; this way I'll have my position and be able to help some poor soul." Back then, even if only incense was thrown into the fire of idol worshippers, the Church would excommunicate them, making them penitents in tears.[8] Those who had denied Christ could find redemption through martyrdom. Or, during the Iconoclastic Controversy, people were forced to burn or destroy the Icons, and they preferred martyrdom rather than desecrate the Icons. Whereas today, if we were told to throw away an Icon, we would just say, "Let me throw this one away; it's Renaissance art. I'll have a Byzantine Icon made later."

– Geronda, how can the Church accept the Crypto-Christians? Didn't they deny Christ?

– Wherever there are real Crypto-Christians, these have not become renegades. Out of the twenty-seven villages belonging to the eparchy of Pharasa in Cappadocia, when the Turks burned them, some of the people left and went faraway. There the local people did not know that they were Christians; they took them to be Muslims. At no time were they asked, "Are you a Christian?" so they could answer, "Yes, I am a Christian," or "No, I am

8. These penitents remained in the outer narthex of the Church appealing to the faithful who were entering the Church to pray for them to the Lord to find redemption (See *Pedalion*, canon 13).

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a Muslim." These are the Crypto-Christians. But from the moment they take one of these people and tell him, "We have heard that you are a Christian," he will answer, "Yes, I am a Christian." He will not say I am a Muslim. Even in the early Christian centuries, there were Christians who were baptized secretly, and others had the impression that they were not Christians. But whenever it was necessary, they would make their confession openly. Saint Sebastian, for example, was a general. He had been baptized a Christian and people thought he was a pagan, when he was a Christian. Secretly he helped the Christians in many ways. However, when it became known that he was a Christian, he confessed his faith and became a martyr.

In one of the Turkish villages, there were many Crypto-Christians and the president was a priest. Papa George was his name, Hasan is what they called him. Once he was informed that there were some Christians hiding in a certain catacomb. "I will go and check it out," he said, "Don't you worry." He took his people, and went and found all the Christians gathered there. He proceeded to the Royal Doors, put on the stole hanging there and began to say Vespers for them! Later he told them to take certain measures to protect themselves. Back in town he told the others, "It was nothing, only rumours." These people are not renegades. But from the moment someone is suspected and they tell him, "You must be a Christian, for I saw you making the sign of the cross," and he says, "No, I am a Muslim," then he denies his faith.

Martyrdom and Humility

One who is made worthy of martyrdom must have great humility and love Christ very much. If he goes to martyrdom with pride, Grace will abandon him. Do you remember Sapriktos[9] who was about to be martyred and yet denied Christ at the very end? "Why did you bring me here?" he said to the executioners. "But aren't you a Christian?" they asked him. "No," he answered. And he was a priest! It seems to me that perhaps he went to his martyrdom with a sense of pride at first and not with humility. He was not going to martyrdom for his faith, for his love of Christ, and for this reason Grace abandoned him. For when one acts out of pride and egoism, he cannot receive the Grace of God, and, at a critical moment, he will deny Christ.

– Geronda, we often say that God will give us strength during difficult times.

– God will give strength to a humble person who has a pure heart, who has good intentions. If God sees a truly good will and humility, He will give great strength. In other words, it will depend upon the will of the person for God to give strength.

– Geronda, you said that one must have humility and good will. Is it possible to have pride and good will?

– When we say humility, we mean that one should have humility at least as far as martyrdom is concerned. One may be proud, but then he must humble himself and say, "My God, I am proud, but give me a little strength

9. See St Nicodemos of the Holy Mountain, *Synaxaristes of the Twelve Months of the Year*, ed. Orthodox Kypseli, Thessaloniki 1982, vol. 3, p. 239-241.

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now to be able to witness to Your love and redeem my sins." In this case, when he approaches martyrdom with repentance and humility, then God gives much Grace. The point is not to go proudly, with the thought that he will become a martyr, that a *synaxarion* and a service will be written for him, and an icon will be painted of him with a halo.

Someone told me, "Father, pray for me to reach the fifth heaven." I asked him, "While Saint Paul only reached to the third Heaven,[10] you are asking to reach the fifth?" "Why not? Doesn't he say that we should strive for the best?[11]" What impudence! In any case, if someone should seek martyrdom only to have glory in Paradise, it is better not to even think of martyrdom. A true and proper Christian, if he knew that even in Paradise he would again have suffering, a martyrdom, still he would long to go there. We must not imagine that if we suffer something here on earth, we will be better there in Heaven. We mustn't add things up like a shopkeeper. We want Christ. Let there be martyrdom, let there by martyrdom every day, let them beat us every day, twice and thrice a day; it doesn't matter. The only thing that concerns us is to be with Christ.

– Geronda, can someone live indolently and, when necessary, confess boldly?

– For someone to be able to do that, he must have inner goodness, sacrifice. That is why I said nobility and the spirit of sacrifice must be cultivated. One should sacrifice himself for others. Do you know about Saint Boniface

10. Cf. 2 Cor 12:2.
11. Cf. 1 Cor 12:31.

and Saint Aglaia?[12] They lived that wretched life in Rome, but as soon as they sat down to eat, their mind went to the poor. They ran first to give food to the poor and then they sat down to eat themselves. Even though they were overcome with passions, they had goodness and truly cared about the poor. They had a sense of self-sacrifice and God helped them.

Even though Aglaia lived a sinful life, she loved the holy Martyrs and cared about the holy Relics. She instructed Boniface and other servants of hers to go to Asia Minor, to pay and gather the Relics of the Martyrs and bring them to Rome. And he told her in jest, "If they bring you my own relic, will you accept it?" But she told him, "Don't joke about such things." Finally, when he got to Tarsus and went to the amphitheatre to buy the holy Relics, he observed the tortures of the Christians and was immediately moved by their forbearance. He ran to them, kissed their bonds and wounds, and asked them to pray for him, so that he would be strengthened by Christ to publicly confess that he was a Christian. Then, he, too, confessed and was martyred in the amphitheatre, and his companions bought his Relic and took it to Rome, where an Angel of the Lord had informed Aglaia about this event. Thus, what Boniface had predicted in jest before leaving Rome, had happened. Later, after distributing her property to the poor, Aglaia lived another fifteen years as an ascetic and became a Saint. You see, they were not helped at first, and their life had

12. The memory of Saint Boniface and Saint Aglaia is celebrated on December 19.

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deviated into evil. But they had the spirit of sacrifice an God did not abandon them.

How Brave the Saints We

– Geronda, I imagine that if I were to see the tortur wheel of Saint Catherine, I would die of fear!

– If you died before you were placed on the wheel, thi would be good; it would be a blessing from God. Bu if you were on the wheel and experienced difficultie there, that would be the torture. The Martyrs had a goo disposition and with Christ's help endured their suffering

What love the holy Martyrs had for Christ, wha bravery! Saint Solomone with her seven children;[13] on by one they were martyred. Saint Longinos[14] prepared meal for those who came to seize him and offered then hospitality. They were anxious to be shown who Longi nos was so they could decapitate him, and he simply tol them, "I will show him to you!" When he finally presente himself to them, they hesitated, but Saint Longinos urge them to carry out the orders they had been given, and s they decapitated him. Saint Gideon the Karakallenos[15] - what amazing forbearance he had! To his executioner he said, "Take my hand, take my leg, take my nose. I short, take everything!" Incredible! But for man to reach that point, he mustn't love himself, he must love God. A mother runs into a fire to save her child. She doesn't fee any pain because her love is stronger than the burning o

13. Their memory is celebrated on August 1.
14. His memory is celebrated on October 16.
15. His memory is celebrated on December 30.

the fire. Her love for her child masks the pain. So you can imagine how much more the love for Christ can mask the pain of martyrdom!

For the Saint approaching martyrdom, the love for Christ is stronger than the pain and neutralizes it. The Martyrs felt the executioner's sword to be sweeter than the bow of a violin. When the love for Christ really blossoms, then martyrdom becomes a festival; fire refreshes better than a bath, because the burning feeling is dispelled by the burning of divine love. A flaying becomes a caress. Divine *eros* takes hold of the heart, takes hold of the mind, and man goes "mad". He does not feel the pain of anything else because his mind is on Christ and his heart is overflowing with joy. So many Saints went to their martyrdom and felt such joy, one would think they were going to a festival! Saint Ignatios[16] ran to his martyrdom shouting, "Let me go to my martyrdom; let the wild beasts devour me." The joy he felt is not even felt by the young man in love who says, "I want to marry her, and I don't care what anybody says, not even my mother or my father." The "madness" of Saint Ignatios was greater than the madness of a young man in love.

All of the Saints struggled for the Love of Christ. The holy Martyrs spilled their blood. The Saintly ascetic Fathers (Hosioi) shed sweat and tears and carried out spiritual experiments on themselves, like good herbalists, suffering themselves out of love for God and the image of God, that is man, in order to leave us their spiritual recipes. This way, we can prevent some evil or cure some spiritual sickness of ours and acquire health and, if we

16. His memory is celebrated on December 20.

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had the *philotimo* to offer ourselves to imitate them, we could even be sanctified.

Naturally, all of the struggles of the Saintly Fathers, the fasting, the vigils, and so forth, or the sufferings of all the holy Martyrs, cannot be compared with our Lord's Passion, because Christ helped them all out of His great love and sweetened their pain. But Christ did not use His divine power at all on Himself and He suffered great pain on His sensitive Body out of great love for His creation. If someone can experience this love of Christ for man, it is then that he can be also inwardly a true human being. Otherwise, he will be more insensitive than even God's inanimate creations, such as the sun, since it, too, felt Christ's Passion and darkened itself, being unable to bear the awful sight. The earth, too, shook with terror when it beheld the Passion of Christ. Even the rocks were broken into pieces. The tombs too were so shaken as to awaken many of the long dead, who came out to protest the people's ingratitude toward God, their Benefactor and Redeemer.

Monastics and Martyrdom

– Geronda, when someone does not do the necessary spiritual work, will he have the faith that God will help him when a difficult time comes, so he can call upon Him in prayer? Are we perhaps so put at ease by the thought that God will help us in our time of need, as to neglect the trouble of preparation?

– We must do the work of preparation. If one does not sow, how can he expect God to bless an abundant harvest

of wheat? Man must sow, and, according to what is sown, God will provide. Even in the army they say, *Be prepared.*

– Geronda, how are we to prepare ourselves?

– When is someone prepared? When the army is on the alert, the soldiers are always ready, with their boots on, with weapons in hand, with ammunitions, waiting for the command to go into battle.

– How long can one stay on the alert?

– It depends. A monk must always be prepared, and then he will never fear anything. What is there to fear? Death? Death will open the door to Paradise, for under the slab of the tomb lies hidden the key to eternity. Moreover, a monk is always in a state of repentance, no matter when he dies. His flight from the world and his monastic vows are a declaration of this. He repents and proceeds to do refined spiritual work. As the love for God and neighbour increases, so the love of and concern for self decreases. That's when what Saint Paul writes comes into effect: *Nothing can separate me from the love of Christ.*[17]

The thought of martyrdom compels worldly people to take refuge in God and to say in fear, "My Christ, My *Panaghia*," while the monk wants to be constantly near God because he loves Him. Many worldly people will do good simply out of fear of going to hell. But the monk does good out of gratitude, out of a desire to be thankful to God, his Benefactor.

– Geronda, how am I to feel martyrdom and monastic asceticism?

– For you to understand a little of what martyrdom means, be prepared to accept even contempt with joy.

17. Cf. Rom 8:35.

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And if you want to feel a little what asceticism is, since you cannot fast for forty days as Christ did, fast at least one Wednesday, the day when He was betrayed, and one Friday, the day they crucified Him.[18] Those who desire to be martyrs out of love for Christ, but for whom there is no martyrdom, can express this burning love of theirs for Christ through a physical form of asceticism for the sake of those departed souls who are burning and need to find some rest. As martyrdom is a festival, asceticism is also a festival, for one finds divine consolation by avoiding all human consolation.

The holy Martyrs felt great joy when they had an opportunity to endure martyrdom. It was from this early martyrdom that asceticism had its beginning in the spiritual life. When Saint Constantine the Great came to power in the Empire, he released the Christians from the prisons – where they were being kept to gradually eliminate them – and the persecutions ended. But those in the prisons, who were waiting with joy for their turn to become martyrs, were greatly disappointed when Constantine the Great altered the course of events. Just when they were expecting to be martyred, they were set free. Consequently, out of love for God and the burning desire to be martyred, they took to the mountains. Thus, the suffering they would have endured under Diocletian and Maximinian, they imposed upon themselves through their ascetic rigours. One would go, with hands tied to ropes, and hang from a tree, praying with pain but with divine gladness. Another was bound for the love of Christ, saying, "This

18. That is to abstain from food and drink for the entire day.

is how Diocletian used to have me tied up." And they felt great joy in enduring their now voluntary sufferings.

The first ascetics began with this divine madness and devoted themselves to asceticism for the love of Christ, and then they were imitated in these ascetic rigours by others who followed them. This is how asceticism entered into our religious way of life. Still others – perhaps even madder than the previous ones – said, "We are the sheep of Christ," and ate only of the grass of the field. These were the "herders". They lived so intensely aware of the benefits of God and their own insignificance that they used to say, "I am an ungrateful animal; all my life I shall eat grass." And this is what they did. They ate grass and rejoiced. Their heart would soar to heights out of love for Christ. They would simply say, "Am I not a sheep of Christ? I shall eat grass."[19] Later, however, the Church forbade this overly rigorous practice because hunters mistook these monks for wild animals and killed them.

Today people cannot understand these things; they consider them to be foolishness! "Why should I eat grass like an animal?" they say, or "For what reason should I be hanging from a tree like this and tormenting my body?" But do you see what Saint Isaac says? *May God grant us also to attain to such derangement*,[20] to attain such a spiritual irregularity.

19. See *Sozomen*, PG 67, 1395f. *Evagrios*, PG 86, 2480B. Moschos, PG 87, 2868B and Leontios PG 93,1688C.

20. See Saint Isaac the Syrian, *The Ascetical Homilies*, Homily 35, p. 159.

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kindnesses and his wonders... The Elder Paisios was brought out by God Himself.

Thousands were the letters which were sent. The Elder said:<<...or psychological problems or cancer or separated family...one of these three will be the problems...these problems give people a rough time...these kind of things they write to me>>. The Elder felt pain either in person or through letters and took it up,self-sacrificed willingly... his heart went out to other people because he loved them. He didn't want and couldn't keep himself aloof when other people suffered. If it was possible he took up people's cross on his shoulder, in order to release them from their cross.

The Elder, while he was curing other people, he didn't asked God to cure him...He wanted to be patient with illnesses. << to make some spiritual money for the old age>> he said amusingly.

The Elder had many illnesses and endured them with bravery and fighting spirit. He felt contempt for pain and laughed at it!...

In 12 July 1994 The Elder Paisios consign his Holy soul peacefully and humbly to The Lord, Who loved so much and served Him since he was young. He was buried in the yard of the hermitage of Saint John the Theologian in Souroti of Thessaloniki.

After his death, The Elder Paisios continues to do wonders. We hope to become known the miraculous events that happened and continue to happen after his death, to glorify God and the faithful to gain advantage from it, but also for the mistrustful who see the words of God to be fulfilled two thousand years ago:<<Whoever believes in me won't die>> and <<Whoever believes in me, …….>>.

So, The elder as faithful servant of Christ, didn't die but lives and does wonders!
May we all have his blessings!

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CHAPTER TWO

Η θυσία φέρνει των χαρά

Sacrifice Brings Joy

Nowadays Sacrifice Is Rare

A woman who had everything told me once that having children is a dizzying bother. She couldn't be bothered to be a mother! When a mother thinks like that, she becomes useless, for mothers, after all, are supposed to have love naturally. Before having her own family, a young woman may be woken up by her mother at ten in the morning. But from the moment she becomes a mother and has to feed and bathe her child, she won't even sleep at night, because the heart starts working. When a person has a sense of sacrifice, he does not complain, he is not lazy; he rejoices. That's the key, to have a spirit of sacrifice. If that woman had said, "Oh Lord, how can I thank you? You have not only given me children, but also many material goods... So many people have nothing and I have houses, I have property from my father, my husband earns a good salary, and I receive two more salaries from rents, and I have an easy life! How can I thank you my God? I am not worthy of these things." If she thought like this, then by praising God she would stop feeling sorry for herself. In other

words, it would have been enough if she had only been grateful to God.

– Geronda, sacrifice gives us joy.

– Oh, what joy it brings! Nowadays people don't savour this joy of sacrifice, and this is why they are tormented. They have no ideals in them; they are too bored to live. A generous heart and self-denial are what drive us. Without this force, we are tormented. In the old days, in the villages, some people would go out at night unseen to quietly open up a pathway for others to bless and forgive them when they died. Now one seldom encounters this spirit of sacrifice.

I remember a festive procession around the Monastery on the Holy Mountain. As the monks walked close by a large bramble bush, their monastic veils would get snagged on a branch. Not one of them stopped for a minute to break it off and get it out of the way for the sake of the others behind; instead, each stooped under it to avoid getting snagged. Were they bowing to the bramble bush? If it were the Sacred Bramble Bush, then it would have been appropriate. People tend to think, "Let someone else take care of the problem, I'll just do my own work." But why don't you take care of it, since you were the first to notice? That is what worldly people who do not believe in God do. I have no use for such a life; I would rather die a thousand deaths. The goal is for each one of us to think of the other person, of the other person's pain.

People seem to have lost control. The sense of *philotimo*, of sacrifice, is gone. I have often told you how it was with me then with the hernia at the *Kalyvi*... When someone rang the bell on the door, I would go and open the door, even in the snow. If someone had a serious

problem, then I would not even feel my own pain, even though I had previously been sick enough for bed. I would also offer them some treat, holding the treat with one hand and the hernia with the other. Throughout our conversation, even though the pain was severe, I would not lean on anything so as not to reveal my discomfort. When the visitor left, I would again collapse from the pain. It was not that before my own pain had passed or that I had been miraculously cured, but, in feeling the other person's pain, I forgot my own. The miracle happens when someone can be compassionate and feel the other's pain. The whole idea here is to be able to see the other person as a brother and feel his pain. It is this very pain that moves God and brings about the miracle. For there is nothing else which moves God as much as a noble and sacrificial spirit. But now, in our time, this kind of nobility is rare, because self-love and self-interest have entered the picture. Seldom does someone say, "Let me give my turn, my place, to someone else, and it's alright if I am delayed." Few are those blessed souls who think of others. Even among the spiritual people, there is a contrary spirit, a spirit of indifference.

The good is good only when the one who does it sacrifices something from himself, some sleep, some rest and so on. That is why Christ said, *But she of her penury hath cast in all the living that she had.*[1] When I am at ease and do some good, it does not have the same value. But when I am tired and someone asks me, let's say, for directions and I do it, then it has value. Or, when I have had plenty of sleep and stay up all night with someone

1. Cf. Lk 21:4; Mk 12:44.

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who needs help, this does not have great value. And if I'm fond of conversation, I may do this in order to enjoy the company and be entertained a little. Whereas, when I am tired and make a sacrifice to help someone, then I experience a heavenly joy. It is then that I am bombarded with the blessing of God!

When someone is too lazy not only to help others, but even to do something for himself, then he can get tired while resting. One who helps rests through tiring himself. One who has the spirit of sacrifice, will, for example, if he sees someone physically weak working and tiring himself, tell him, "sit down and rest", and do the work. The weak person will get physical rest, but the other will experience spiritual rest. Whatever one does he must do it with his heart, otherwise he is not transformed spiritually. Whatever is done with the heart does not tire us. The heart is like a machine that is charged; the more it works, the more it is charged. You see, the chain saw, when it finds a soft log, goes "vrrrrr..." and stops; but when it finds a hard log, it forces itself, gets overcharged and really works effectively. And, not only when we give, but also when we are about to receive something, let us not think of ourselves, but let us look to see what will be of some comfort to the other person. Let us not be greedy and insatiable, believing that we are entitled to take all we want, leaving nothing for others.

– Geronda, again it is the spirit of sacrifice that enters into the situation.

– But in the spiritual life the whole basis is there. Can you imagine what joy is experienced by the one who sacrifices himself? One cannot even express the joy he feels. Sublime joy emanates from sacrifice. Only when

we sacrifice ourselves can we be related to Christ, for Christ is sacrifice. Man can live in Paradise from here and now, or he can live in hell. Whoever does good is overjoyed, for he is rewarded with divine consolation. Whoever does evil suffers.

My Repose Stems From the Repose of Others

– Geronda, if someone has not tasted the joy of sacrifice, how can he attain such a spirit of sacrifice?

– By putting himself in the other's place. When I was serving in the army, the machine-gun post was often filled with water; the batteries for the wireless needed to be changed – and it was very difficult, because the line was overloaded. I was drenched to my waist and my overcoat was dripping. Yet, I preferred to do the work myself so as not to trouble the others, and I was happy to do it. My commanding officer would tell me, "I am at ease and feel secure when you do the work, but I feel sorry for you. Let someone else go and do the work." But I would tell him, "No, I am happy to do it, sir." There was another wireless operator in our company, but during the manoeuvres, I didn't let him carry the batteries or the wireless, even though they were heavy, so that he wouldn't be in danger. He pleaded with me, "Why don't you let me carry them?" And I would tell him, "You have a wife and children. If you are killed, I will have to answer to God." So God protected both of us; He didn't allow either of us to get killed.

It is preferable for a sensitive person to die once out of love in order to protect his neighbour, rather than be neglectful or cowardly and then to be constantly tormented by his conscience for the rest of his life.

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Once, during the guerrilla warfare manoeuvres, the guerrillas had cut us off outside one of the villages, and the soldiers were going to draw lots to see who would go into the village for supplies. "I'll go," I said. If some inexperienced or careless soldier had to go, he could have been killed and then my conscience would have troubled me. "It would be better," I thought, "for me to die than the other soldier, and then to have my conscience killing me for the rest of my life. How could I endure that? My conscience would tell me, 'You could have saved him; why didn't you save him?'" At the time, I was fasting and had not eaten ... but never mind that. Our commanding officer told me, "I, too, prefer that you go, for you are experienced, but you should eat something to have energy." I took my weapon and set off. The guerrillas mistook me for one of their men and allowed me to pass through. I went into the village and entered a two-storied house. An elderly woman who was there gave me supplies and I returned to my company safely.

The greatest joy I experienced in the winter, there in the snow. I remember one night waking up, while the others were still sleeping. The snow had covered the tents. I went, took the wireless, removed the snow from its holes and saw that it still worked. I ran to our commanding officer and told him. That night I saved twenty-six soldiers from freezing by digging them out of the snow with a shovel. I have done nothing for Christ. If only ten percent of what I did in the army had been done for Christ, now I would be doing miracles! This is why later as a monk I would say, "While in the army I went through so many hardships for my country, but now as a monk what am I doing?" In other words, compared to the hardships

I endured in the army, my life as a monk was like being a prince – regardless if I had or didn't have even a crust of bread to eat. Have you any idea what kind of fasting we did during the army manoeuvres? We ate granulated snow. The others ran about and found something to eat. But I could not move about with the wireless. Once we were without food for thirteen days. They had rationed to us one loaf of bread and half a salted herring. Sometimes the only thing we had to drink was the muddy water in the hoof prints of the animals. Most of the time, I had to quench my thirst not with clean rainwater, but with muddy water. Once I even drank some ... "orange juice"! Later as a monk, even the water that may not have been so pure seemed to me like a great blessing. At least it looked like water.

Once one afternoon, the ground line had been broken. It was December of 1948. The snow was deep. At four o'clock in the afternoon, the order was given to go to the village two hours away, to repair the line and return. In the meantime, there were only two more hours of daylight. The soldiers were dead tired and didn't have the energy to start. And how was one to find the broken line in so much snow!

– Didn't you know the way and where the line was?

– Well, I had an idea where the road was, but the night was fast approaching. In any case, they gave me a group of soldiers and we started out. At first we cleared the snow from the road in the camp and proceeded a little to set our commanding officer at ease. Then I said, "Let's move on now, for we must also return." I took the lead because the others were resisting. They were grumbling, "Greece never dies ... but we are dying." The same thing

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over and over again. Again and again, I would sink into the snow, and they would lift me up. I carried a bayonet which I would thrust into the snow to create a grounding. I had to check constantly. I would get in the front. "Move on, animals don't pass this way to cut the line. Only in some depression in the ground where the line may be suspended over it, there is where we should check." Finally, we reached a village with terraces, but because the wind had made snow drifts there, we could not see anything. When we reached the terraces, I fell into the snowdrift and the others had a hard time getting me out. Gradually, going from one terrace to the next, don't even ask me how, we all descended to the village late at night. In some nearby depressions I found the broken line dangling in two places; we repaired it and were able to communicate with our commander. He told us, "Return to the camp." But how were we to return to the camp? Aside from it being night time, how were we to climb the terraces, from which we virtually had just rolled down. How were we to find our way at night? So I told him, "We made it downhill, but now it will be very difficult going uphill. Let us return tomorrow morning by going around the village." He insisted that we return that night. Fortunately, an adjutant heard the commander and pleaded with him to allow us to remain in the village that night, which we did. We received hospitality in a house and they gave us several *tserges*,[2] to sleep in. I was completely soaked by shovelling the snow to open the way in front, so they felt sorry for me and placed me in the middle so that I could be warm. During all that time,

2. *Tserga* (pl. *Tserges*): a heavy and coarse woolen blanket, a velentza

we had eaten just a piece of rooty. I cannot remember experiencing a greater joy in my life.

I had to give you these examples so that you understand what sacrifice means. I didn't tell you all these things so that you'd applaud me, but so that you understand where true joy comes from. In addition to the above, some people in the Signals Office would tell me lies, "My father is coming and I need to go and see him. Please take over my duties for a while." Another would say, "My sister is here" – and she wasn't even his sister. Still others would say something else, and I would constantly be doing some service for one or another of my fellow soldiers and sacrificing myself. Then I would also sweep and clean, because it was forbidden for others to enter the Signals Company. Not even an officer from another service was permitted to enter, for it was wartime. We could not even get someone to clean. So I would pick up the broom and clean up all the areas. It was there that I learned to sweep. I simply thought to myself, "This, a place of service, and in a way it is a sacred place; it cannot be untidy." I was not required to do the cleaning, nor did I know how. At home, I had never touched a broom, and, if I had, my sister would have taken it from me and given me a beating with it. The others called me "the cleaning woman" or "perpetual victim". But I never minded these things. And I never did anything to hear a "thank you". I really did it with my heart, because I felt it was necessary, and I enjoyed it.

– Geronda, did you have any negative thoughts? For example, did you think that fellow is just going out; he's not going to see his sister?

– No, I didn't have such thoughts. From the moment

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someone said to me, "Please, can you take my place for a while," that was it; it was done. Sometimes someone would ask me for money and tell me it was for his children. He not only did not send the money to his children, but asked for more from his wife to spend on himself. You see? Nor did I do it to earn praise. I simply felt it as a need. Because I never took any leave, the others took advantage of this and left their work for me to do. I ended up doing all the company's work. The signals were piling up, and the lines were constantly busy. I would get worn out. Once I had a temperature of 39.5 C. and didn't tell anyone. Finally, I fainted from exhaustion and they took me away on a stretcher to a hospital. I heard them saying, "Come on Benedictos,[3] we are taking you with the stretcher to the garage for overhaul!" They left me there alone – who would pay any attention to me? Their concern was for the wounded –, but I felt joy, the joy which comes from sacrifice. For I found my repose in the repose of others.

The More We Forget Ourselves the More God Remembers Us

Whoever has faith in God and a sacrificial spirit does not consider himself. When someone does not cultivate the spirit of sacrifice, he thinks only of himself and wants everybody else to sacrifice themselves for him. But whoever thinks only of himself is isolated from others as well as from God – a double isolation – in which case

3. Benedictos was the name of the preacher in that region, and the fellow soldiers of the Elder, when they wanted to tease him, called him Benedictos.

he cannot receive divine Grace. He becomes a useless person. One can readily see that he who thinks constantly of himself, his difficulties and troubles, and so on, will not find even some human assistance when a need arises. Not having divine assistance is one thing, but not having even some human assistance is quite another. Then he will struggle one way or another to find some help. He will torment himself trying to find some help from men, but he will not find such help. On the contrary, someone who does not think of himself but thinks constantly of others, in the good sense, will be thought of constantly by God, and then others will also think of him. The more one forgets himself, the more God remembers him. Look at some soul in a Monastery sacrificing herself, offering herself, and so on. Do you think that this will not be noticed by others? Is it possible for others not to think of this soul offering herself entirely and not thinking of herself? Is it possible for God not to think of her? This is important! Here one can see the blessing of God, how God works.

Someone is tested through the trials of life. It is there that you see if he has real love, a true spirit of sacrifice. And when we say that someone has the spirit of sacrifice, we mean that at the time of danger he does not consider himself but thinks of the others. You see that even the popular proverb affirms this, *A friend in need is a friend indeed.* God forbid, but if bombs were to fall now, it would reveal who is thinking of others and who is thinking of himself. But someone who is used to thinking only of himself will at a time of danger also think of himself, and God will not think of him. When even now someone does not think of himself but is thoughtful and consider-

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ate of others, he will do the same at a time of danger. It is then that it becomes clear who are truly the people with a sacrificial spirit and who are the selfish ones.

If one does not start sacrificing something now, like giving up some desire or selfishness, how will he ever be able to sacrifice his life at a difficult time? If, even now, he thinks of the labour and tries to avoid working a little harder than the next person, how will he ever attain the state of risking his own life to save another's? If now he thinks only of himself even in small matters, how can he then think of others when his own life is in danger? Then it will be far more difficult. If difficult times come and a selfish person sees a neighbour, for example, sick with fever collapsing in the street, he will leave him there and go away saying, "I must go and lie down to rest lest, I, too, become sick."

During wartime, your own life is struggling with the life of the other. Bravery is running to save another's life. When there is no spirit of sacrifice, everyone looks to only save himself. And it is often seen that someone who during the war tries to hide is most often found by a hand grenade. He attempts to escape and he comes a cropper. For this reason, one must not try to escape, especially at the expense of others. I remember an incident during the Albanian war. A soldier had a stone slab to protect his head. In the meantime, he had to move over and he set the slab down. Immediately the soldier next to him took it, saying, "Here's my chance to take it for myself now." At that moment, a mortar fell on him and killed him. He saw the incoming fire and took the slab for himself without thinking of the other soldier who would return. He thought only of himself and justified his action. "Since the

other soldier moved over a little, I can now take his slab for myself." Yes, he left, but it was his protective slab.

Another person tried throughout the duration of the war to save himself. He thought of no one but himself. The others helped, but he stayed at home. He sought until the very end, when things became very difficult, to avoid danger. Later, when the British had come, he went to the camp, presented himself to Napoleon Zervas[4] and, because he also had American citizenship, found an opportunity to leave for America. As soon as he arrived there he died! His poor wife used to say, "He tried to escape from God!" He died, while others who went to war survived.

Those Who Die Bravely Do Not Die

I remember that in the army we all had a common goal. I tried, but the spirit of sacrifice existed in the others as well, regardless of whether or not they believed in the afterlife. "Why should he be killed? He is a family man," they would say, and they would volunteer for a dangerous mission. The sacrifice they made had greater value than the sacrifice made by a believer. The faithful person believes in divine justice and divine recompense, whereas the others do not know their sacrifice will not be in vain and will have its recompense in the afterlife.

4. Napoleon Zervas (1891-1957): A Greek General and Politician. He was one of the most significant figures of the national resistance movement against the Germans and, later on, against the guerrillas.

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During the Occupation, back then with Constantine Davakis,[5] the Italians had arrested young officers, put them in a boat and sank it. Later, they gathered the first people they found and tortured them to reveal who had weapons. What a great sacrifice made by worldly people! In Konitsa, near our home, where they have now built the Church of Saint Cosmas Aitolos,[6] there used to be a mosque. They were locked up in the mosque and severely beaten throughout the night with whips and wires and other instruments of torture which tore their skin. To muffle the cries of the prisoners, their captors sang or played music. This is where the saying came from: "To be beaten to music." They even hung them upside down until the blood started oozing from their mouths. But they did not speak throughout these tortures, for they thought, "If we talk and reveal who has weapons – for they knew who did have some weapons – they will beat all the others to get them to confess." This is why the first group said, "Let us die and prove to them that the others don't have any weapons." But there were some who for a few pounds of flour would say so and so has a couple of weapons.

People were dying of hunger and would readily betray others. A battalion made up of Italian soldiers who were all illegitimate children and had grown to be particularly cruel would then release all their anger. They'd take little children, place them naked on hot metal machines, step on them so they'd burn so that their parents might reveal

5. Constantine Davakis (1897-1943): Infantry colonel and a Greek-Italian war hero. The Greek army's heroic encounter during the outbreak of the Italian attack in Epeirus is owed to him.

6. Saint Cosmas Aitolos (1714-1779). His feast is celebrated on August 24.

where the weapons were hidden. "We have no weapons, we have no weapons!" the older people shouted, but the Italians continued to torture and burn the children. What I am trying to say is that these more or less worldly people were willing to die so the others would not be beaten or even killed. This way they saved many lives. That's how our Nation was upheld in those difficult times, by a handful of brave men!

Those who die bravely do not die. Without heroism nothing can be done. And know that a believer is also brave. Look at poor Makriyannis,[7] what he suffered and at what period of time!

– Geronda, Yannis Makriyannis wrote once, "My eyes smoked."

– Yes, his eyes did smoke, and they looked like they had vapours coming out of them from all the intensity and agony he felt. He found himself in that situation, and, out of pain and love, he constantly sacrificed himself. He did not think of himself or consider his own interests. And he had no fear of being killed when he was struggling for his country. Yannis Makriyannis experienced spiritual conditions. If he were to become a monk, I believe that he would not have differed much from Saint Anthony. He used to do three thousand prostrations while his body still suffered from war injuries and wounds. During his devotions, his wounds would open, and his intestines would come out and he would push them back in. Three

7. Yannis Makriyannis (1797-1864): General in the Greek revolution of 1821 and a great fighter. Following the independence of the Greek State, he also fought for the granting of a constitution to the Greek people by Otto, the Monarch of Greece. He authored acclaimed memoirs, known as the *Memoirs of Makriyannis*.

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of my prostrations equal one of his. He would wet the floor with his tears. If we were in his place, we would go to the hospital to be cared for by others. And these worldly people will be our judges!

He Who Does Not Consider Himself Receives Divine Power

– Geronda, was your life ever in danger during the war?

– Oh yes, not just once or twice. I think now how God helped and I'm profoundly moved. I didn't think of it then. Especially death, I didn't think about it at all. When you are determined to face death, you aren't afraid of anything. The determination for death is equal to a thousand guards. Death is security. In war, the sacred companies of dedicated soldiers have the skull as their symbol; it says that they are ready to die. Whoever doesn't think of himself but prefers the good of others and the general good, receives divine power. And you see, when someone acts with a sacrificial spirit, God protects him.

I remember once we set up a defensive post behind a huge boulder. I had dug a foxhole and was hiding in it. A fellow soldier came and asked me, "May I come in too?" Another soldier came and asked the same thing. I allowed them to come into my foxhole and I remained outside. At night when many bullets were being fired, one literally grazed my scalp. I was wearing only a hood, not the helmet. I shouted, "Guys, I've been hit!" I touched my head with my hand and looked, but there was no blood. I touched it again, nothing. The bullet had grazed my head

and had only cut my hair toward the back, leaving a strip six centimetres wide without any hair!

You have not gone through difficult years or occupations; you have not seen wars or enemies, and so on – and I hope you never do – nor do you understand such things. But these years are like a pressure-cooker that is boiling and whistling. It takes endurance, bravery and manliness. If something should happen, be sure not to leave yourselves completely unprepared. Be prepared from now to be able to face any potential difficulty. What did Christ say? Didn't He say, *Be ye ready*?[8] Living in such difficult times as we do today gives us one more reason to be all the more prepared. It is not only sudden death that we may encounter; there are other dangers as well. Therefore, dispel the spirit of ease and comfort for ourselves. Let the sense of *philotimo* prevail. May you always have the spirit of sacrifice.

Now I see something that is about to happen, but is constantly postponed. There are many short postponements. Who is making these delays? Is God pushing? Let's give it one more month, two months! This is how the present situation is going.[9] But because we do not know what is waiting for us, it is best to cultivate as much as possible the virtue of love. This is the most important of all: to have true love among yourselves, sisterly love, not false love. Always, when there is true concern for each other, compassion and love, one can act correctly. Kindness and love are empowering. As far as possible, be discreet in your conversations and do not overly open

8. Mt 24:44; Lk 12:40.
9. This was said in November of 1984.

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up to others. One will say it to another and another to yet another, and then what will come of that? It is entirely possible from one foolish remark to cause a lot of harm, and then you'll be knocking your heads on the wall. You should have seen the secrecy observed in the army! Your first responsibility if captured was to destroy the secret signals code. You had to cut it into small pieces and swallow them. Once, when I was in danger of being captured, I swallowed them. Otherwise, if the guerrillas had taken them and had learned the army was in a particular place, needing food or supplies, they could then send a message to our headquarters, and the air force would be dispatched to drop food for them and bombs on our army. You see? The guerrillas could present themselves as the army. If you were captured and they knew you were the wireless operator, they would pull out your fingernails with pliers to make you tell them the secret signals code. And you were willing to endure that torture rather than to betray the secret code. Another soldier was burned under the armpits to deliver a particular secret letter. He did not give in and became paralysed from the torture. He did not confess and that is why he became a confessor. Some women transported secret communications hidden in saddles and were determined to die if necessary.

Death in wartime is very redeeming when someone sacrifices himself in order to protect others. Those who sacrifice their life from pure love in order to protect their fellow human being are imitating Jesus Himself. They are the greatest heroes, because they are feared even by death itself, as out of love they defy death and gain immortality, taking the key of eternity right out from under the slab of the tomb and trip lightly toward eternal blessedness.

The Entire Life of a Monk Is a Sacrifice

The monk is helped naturally by his whole way of life to have love and sacrifice. He has set out to die for Christ. In other words, he set out for sacrifice. Having no obligations, the monk is obliged to cultivate the spirit of sacrifice. A layman does not set out to die for Christ. In addition, he has obligations; he must think of his family, his children, and for this he has extenuating circumstances, he can be justified. For example, during a war, one who has a family may try to avoid the danger, for the sake of his children. He may not think that, in doing so, someone else may die who also has children. In any case, there is here at least a concern for his family. He says, "My children must not be left on the street." He may not even believe in the other life and be only trying to save this life.

– In other words, Geronda, a monk must be constantly sacrificing himself.

– Look, didn't we say that the whole life of a monastic person is one big sacrifice? Otherwise we achieve nothing. If a monastic is making slow progress in this matter, then he is not a monastic. Then where is the spirituality? There is no spirituality when there is no sacrifice. All the spiritual disciplines which a monk does without sacrificing himself are nothing. On the Holy Mountain, such aspects of the spiritual life, for example prayer, fasting, vigils, and so forth, are called *koukouskiachtika* (scarecrow). In other words, a monk who performs these spiritual disciplines cannot dispel the demons; at best he may dispel the crows. When someone takes seriously the struggle that must be carried out in this life, there is a divine flame in him. If this divine flame is missing, then he

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is useless. It is this that gives him joy, courage, *philotimo*. This is what the Lord said, *I came to cast fire upon the earth.*[10] When this divine fire exists, then the chanting and the prayer we do for ourselves and for others will have results. This is especially true for a woman's heart which, when purified, has tremendous power. They also make great strides in prayer, becoming a radar for God. Whoever has no *philotimo*, no sacrifice, will have either worldly joy or worldly worries, but he cannot experience spiritual delight.

This is why I say that sacrifice must be developed, the sense of brotherhood. Each one of you must acquire a spiritual state, in order to be able to get through things alone at a difficult time. If one is not in this spiritual state, he may falter because of self-love. He may even deny or betray Christ. You must be prepared to die. Here there are laypersons in the world who sacrifice themselves and don't even believe in Paradise. We believe that nothing is lost and our sacrifice has meaning. When laypersons who are ignorant of all these things sacrifice themselves and put themselves in danger to protect others, can monastics neglect to cultivate the spirit of sacrifice? We start out to die for the love of Christ; we have no obligations and, well, if we have no sense of sacrifice, what are we doing then? Even the ants will laugh at us! Have you seen ants making fun of humans? They make fun of the lazy ones!

– Geronda, is it possible for me to be willing to serve others and not have pure motives?

– This can be recognized. When the motives are not pure, the soul does not find peace. In this case, you detect

the problem and try to purify the motives. I was impressed by one of the souls that came these days. When she learns that someone is sick and suffering, she cannot sleep, and cries in compassion. And she lives in the world. She said this to someone and was advised, "It may be from temptation." Can this be from temptation? Only if it is done ostentatiously can one be fooled by temptation to live a false spiritual state.

Take your own self out of your activities. When someone goes beyond himself, he goes beyond the earth. He moves in another atmosphere. As long as he remains in the self, he cannot become a heavenly person. There is no spiritual life without sacrifice. Once in a while, remember death. Since we are to die, let's not be so attentive to ourselves. I don't mean be careless and allow harm to come, but don't worship ease and comfort. Nor am I saying throw yourself into danger, but at least have some heroism, you know? Look at the heroes and the bravery with which they faced death in battle.

I was told by a monk who was with Georgios Kondylis[11] – Kondylis was a patriot, a hero. During the war in Asia Minor, the Greeks had disembarked near Constantinople. Kondylis, still in his ship, saw the City from a distance and, deeply moved, shouted with excitement, "Come on men, we are going to die sooner or later; why not today? Let's die bravely! Let's die as heroes for our

11. Georgios Kondylis (1878-1936): Military leader and politician. At the age of 18 he voluntarily enlisted in the army where he was soon distinguished during his participation in the Revolution of Crete (1896), the Greco-Turkish War (1897), as well as in the Macedonian Struggle (1904-1908). He carried out a leading role in the political developments of Greece and served as Prime Minister (1926) and Regent (1935).

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country!" He was eager to approach the landing dock. In his excitement, he didn't notice that the ship had not yet touched the dock when he jumped over the side, and he fell into the sea! That's how excited he was. He was unable to swim, so his men jumped in and got him out.

– Geronda, you told us to try to keep our self out of our activities. How is this done?

– You like to have everything ready-made. What does it mean to take my self out? When do I take my self out? How are we to take our self out of our love? How are we to brighten up our love? The less I consider myself, the more I remove my self. And when we cut our will, our weakness, our ease and comfort, then we take our self out, too. And a lot of things vanish from our self through obedience and silence. And when our love is not selfish and self-involved, again, we take our self out, but our love must also be sacrificial. Do you understand this? Let us suppose, for example, that one of the nuns wants to go and see the Abbess and sees another Sister who also wants to go. If she immediately relinquishes her turn to the other, while knowing that the other does not have serious matters to discuss, then she is truly obedient, sacrificial, and so on. And when with her whole heart she gives up her turn and does not speak with the Abbess, well, then, it will be Christ Himself Who will speak with her. But she must take this to be a necessity, her heart must be in it, and she must not do it merely because the holy Fathers say so. This way she can receive a double portion of the Grace of God. In this case, one nun will be helped spiritually in human terms, while the other will be helped in divine terms, directly by Christ.

We see lay people who demonstrate a degree of sacrifice that even monastics don't have. In the world – and I'm impressed by this – even though people may not believe, may have their weaknesses, their passions, God provides for them to have a gentle and kind heart. They see someone who is in need, even a total stranger, and they go and help him. Many who do not even believe in Paradise, if they see danger, they run to prevent some evil from happening, they will endanger themselves to save others, to save property, and so on.

Many years ago, a worker in a factory was in danger of getting caught in the gears of a large machine and, while there were many men around, it was actually a woman who ran to save him. The men who were supposed to be brave stood there watching... Finally, the woman saved the man, but her own skirts got caught in the machine and she was killed. A martyr indeed!

Such people don't take their own self into consideration; they throw the self out. And when the self is thrown out, that's when Christ is thrown in!

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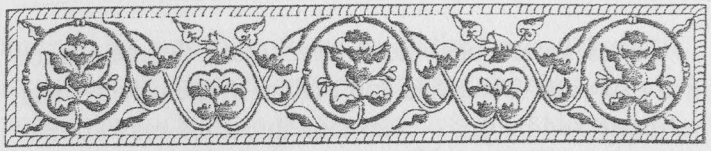

CHAPTER THREE

Bravery Is Born of Trust in God

Bravery Is Not Barbarity

Heroic deeds are done by the brave; the big-hearted – not the big-framed – who are determined to sacrifice themselves. And in wartime, those who are real heroes also have a goodness about them and do not kill unnecessarily. Bravery has no room for barbarity. They may shoot all around the enemy in such a way as to force him to surrender. The good man prefers to be killed than to kill. And when someone has such intentions, he receives divine strength. Evil men are cowards, unmanly, bullies; they fear both themselves and others; this is why they will be constantly shooting more out of fear than purpose.

During the guerilla warfare when I served with the Army, we had gone to a village. They told us, "There are none of the guerrillas here; they've all gone away. Only one crazy woman is left." One of our men saw her in the distance and immediately fired one or two rounds with his weapon! The poor woman shouted, "What have I done to you?" and then fell down.

– Did he do this out of fear?

–Yes, out of fear. Such a person looks for the easy solution for himself. In order to be certain he says, "It's better to get rid of the enemy." The less cowardly person is also the less evil. He will try to disable the enemy, he will try, let's say, to break his arm or his leg, not kill him.

Manliness, bravery is one thing, but malice, criminality, is another. It is not manly to take the enemy, the prisoners, and slaughter them. Manliness is taking the enemy prisoner, breaking his weapons and then letting him go. That is what my father did. Whenever he caught any Tsetes[1] who raided the town of Pharasa, he took their weapons and broke them, telling the raiders, "You're women; not men." Then he would let them go. Once he dressed up as a Turkish woman and went into their camp and asked for their captain. Previously he had made plans with his own men to attack when the signal was given. When the Tsetes took my father to their captain, he said, "Send your men away so we can be alone." When they were alone, he grabbed the captain's weapon, broke it and told him, "Now you're the woman and I am Eznepides."[2] Then he gave the signal, and his brave men came upon the Tsetes and chased them from the town.

To get ahead one must have a crazy streak, in the good sense of the term. Depending on how you use this crazy streak, you can become either a saint or a hero. But if you are not helped and are led astray, you can also become a criminal. One who doesn't have a crazy streak cannot become either a saint or a hero. That is why we

1. Turkish irregulars.
2. The family name of the Elder.

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need to get our inner engine started, our heart to work, our bravery. Our heart must become foolhardy.

I know many military men who have been retired and are full of chagrin. Some of them are looking for a war to begin so they can be active again. Others, tremble at the thought of being called up for military duty, while others feign madness to avoid it. Many veterans tell me they would like to go up to Bosnia to fight. They have not used their bravery in the spiritual life and, for this reason, when they hear of war, they are ready to go and fight. These people who have so much energy and will, if they had only come to know the spiritual life, can you imagine what asceticism, what spiritual struggles they would have been able to undertake? They would have become saints.

There Was Such Bravery in the Past

– Geronda, once you told us something about your grandmother...

– My grandmother was a very brave woman. She always carried a scimitar with her for security. You see, she was a widow with two children, how could she make ends meet with the Turks. Those were difficult years... Everyone was afraid of her. She was a true *pallikari*! Once a thief went to steal from the vineyard near the cemetery. To frighten the people, the thief wore a white shirt which covered his entire body. He entered the cemetery and wandered around the graves. Right then my grandmother happened to pass by the cemetery. As soon as he saw her, the thief laid down and pretended to be dead, hoping to frighten her by taking him to be some vampire. But she came up to him and told him, "If you were a good man the earth

would have consumed your body!" She then turned the scimitar on its blunt side and started beating the thief. She beat him very severely. She didn't even know who he was. Later in town she heard about someone who had been somehow severely beaten and that's how she found out who he was.

Brave people are rare in our times. People today are lukewarm. That's why if, God forbid, a war breaks out, some will die out of fear, others will fall on the street from some minor hardship because they are so used to comforts. In the past, people were so brave! In the Monastery of the Flavians in Asia Minor, the Turks had captured a man and slaughtered him. Then they told his wife, "Either deny Christ or we will kill your children, too." And she replied, "My husband is now with Christ, and my children I entrust to Christ, and I will not renounce Christ." What bravery! If Christ is not in us, how can there be such bravery? Today, people without Christ are building their homes on rubble.

In those years, the mothers and the children were brave and courageous souls. In Konitsa, I remember a pregnant woman who would walk alone an hour and a half away to hoe the cornfield. There she gave birth to her child, wrapped it in her apron and returned home. As she passed by our home, she told us, "I now have a baby!" This happened during the difficult years of the Occupation. Now there are women who, out of fear, spend six or seven months lying down in order to give birth to a child. Of course, it is different for those women who have to do this for reasons of health.

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Natural Fear Serves as a Brake

– Geronda, I am very afraid and think of what am I going to do in some difficult situation. Where does this fear come from?

– Maybe someone suffered something as a child and is now afraid because of that. Many times the fear may be natural, but it can also stem from a lack of faith, from the lack of trust in God. But fear can also be a brake because it helps man to turn to God. Man is afraid and looks to find something to hold on to and is then forced to hold on to God. You see, in tropical jungles inhabited by wild native people there are also wild animals, large beasts, boas, and so forth, in order to force the people to seek help from God, to turn to God, and to find their path. Otherwise, what would it take to constrain these people? All that God has made serves some purpose.

– Those who do not know the true God, and who out of fear seek help, do they receive help?

– Look, they turn their head upward and that too is something. Even for young children fear is a brake. Some children, if they are not threatened a little, don't listen to anyone, neither father nor mother. When I was a small child, they told me about the *bouboulos* (the scary being who is supposed to frighten children into obedience). It is natural for a young child to be afraid. But as the child grows up, the mind matures and the fear subsides. Natural fear is helpful during our childhood years. When a person grows up and still fears the most insignificant things, then he is to be pitied. Spiritual people come to my *Kalyvi* and tell me, "Someone next door to us has died and since then we are terribly afraid all the time." They ask me to pray

for their fear to go away. My response to them is this, "Here we try to cultivate a constant memory of death, for our spiritual edification, and you want to dispel this fear of death because someone has died next door to you!"

There is a little extra natural fear among women. Few are the women who are not afraid. But these same women may also create problems in the family by not subordinating themselves. By the same token, a man who is not by nature timid and who has a certain air of bravery may become impudent. And there are some women who are extremely afraid. When a woman has a natural fear, and she struggles with it to acquire courage, this is a significant achievement. Woman, who by nature has the spirit of sacrifice, also has much self-renunciation, which a man may not have, in spite of his natural manliness.

He Who Is Not Afraid of Death Is Feared by Death Itself

– Geronda, how does fear go away?

– With bravery. The more we fear, the more we become susceptible to temptation. He who is afraid needs to try to dispel his fears. When I was a small boy, I was afraid to pass by the cemetery. For this reason, I slept three nights in the cemetery and the fear went away. I made the sign of the cross and entered – without lighting a flashlight, to avoid alarming anyone at night. If one does not struggle to be strong and mature, and if one does not acquire authentic love, he will find himself in difficult situations and become utterly lamentable.

– In other words Geronda, can someone train himself so as to not be afraid?

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– He should be glad to die so others may not die. If he can put himself in this position, he will never be afraid of anything. A spirit of bravery is born from an abundance of goodness, love, and self-sacrifice. But today people do not want to hear about death. I have learned that funeral directors no longer use the term "Office for Funerals" but "Office of Services", so as to avoid any reference to death. But if people do not think about death, they are living outside reality. Those who fear death and love the vain life of this world also fear germs and are constantly overcome by a timidity that always grips them in a state of spiritual death. Daring people are never afraid of death, and that is why they struggle with *philotimo* and self-renunciation. Because they place death before them on a daily basis, they prepare themselves more spiritually and they undertake a more daring discipline. This is how they overcome the vanity of the world, and experience while alive the joy of eternal Paradise. Even in war, whoever struggles for his ideals, his faith and his country, should make the sign of the cross and not be afraid. God provides and helps. If he makes the sign of the cross and puts his life in God's hands, He will then judge if he should live or die.

– Is it possible for someone to not be afraid out of thoughtlessness?

– This is much worse, for in some critical danger he can suffer such a jolting that will completely undo him once and for all. Whereas, someone who is a little afraid will be careful, and will not expose himself thoughtlessly to dangers. He may be forceful and daring, but he must also trust in God and not in himself.

Courage Is of Great Merit

In a time of disaster more harm is done from the panic which is created. In a time of danger the most important thing is to keep calm and collected. We see sometimes how the hen challenges the eagle and goes after him! And the cat attacks the dog to save her kittens! It raises its tail straight up like a cypress tree and starts to hiss... A cat is ready to risk everything, while we humans are timid and scared!

Do not panic. Women especially panic easily. During the Occupation, I remember we had to go to a place two hours away from Konitsa. The children were walking ahead, and found some helmets and military clothing of Greek soldiers, put them on and went to the Chapel of Saint Constantine the Great. I was there too, I had gone to worship. I was seventeen years old. As soon as the mothers saw them from afar they began shouting, "The Italians are coming!" And they turned to go away. They did not stop to look and see what was really happening. The children after all were wearing Greek helmets. Assuming they were Italians, the mothers fled in fear of their own children!

Courage is of great merit. If you tell a healthy person who lacks courage, "You look pale; what is the matter with you?" he will run to the doctor, when in fact he may be pale simply because he didn't get a good night's sleep, or his tooth was aching, and so forth. A Greek will either lead the way or panic. Cowards are useless. In wartime such people are not wanted at all; they cannot be trusted. They will not be included in an attack on the front lines so they don't create problems. A cowardly soldier, not

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knowing the strategic plan, can create enough panic to make an entire division go to pieces. Fear magnifies the imagination and he can easily begin shouting, "Look they're coming! They're here! They're killing us! Run! Where can we go! They have so many troops!" He can do a lot of damage, because others are readily influenced by such cries. On the other hand, one who is bold and brave will see the enemy and say, "They're ants, not men, come on men!" And the others charge forward with boldness. This is why they say in the army that it is better to have five bold men facing a situation with composure, than twenty cowards.

– Geronda, sometimes during a difficult situation involving a group of people, it is not so much the external dangers as the dangers from within.

– Yes, that's true. The Turks would not have been able to take the fortified Souli, if it had not been betrayed by Pelios Goussis, who was from Souli. He led the enemy up a secret path. You see, five villages were united in harmony, and could stand up to the army of Ali Pasha, who had the power to go against the Sultan.[3] Souli was close to the region controlled by Ali Pasha, but still they were able to deal with him effectively. The women of Souli were especially united among themselves and demonstrated great bravery! They, too, took up arms to defend themselves!

3. Sultan in Turkish means leader. The title given to the leaders of the Ottoman Empire and later to the leaders of other Muslim countries.

Discipline

– Geronda, when somewhere there is usually a lack of discipline, is it possible to have discipline in a critical situation?

– When there is a fire, for example, people don't just do whatever comes into their heads. Everyone on the team awaits directions from the leader. The one person in charge looks over the situation and determines what needs to be done. Otherwise, a panic could develop, and instead of putting out the fire, they could intensify it.

Once I was returning to the Holy Mountain. When we got to the point between the Monasteries of Vatopedi and Pantokratoros, a north-east wind began to blow and the sea began to swell. The captain turned the boat into the wind and sailed against the waves, because otherwise we would have sunk. A timid man from Ierissos, who knew nothing about boats or the sea – he worked with mules – started shouting to the captain, "What are you doing, you'll drown us! Don't you see? He's taking us to Kavala!" With that, the others got up and turned on the captain. But the poor captain insisted, "Let me be, I know what I am doing." Fortunately, one of the passengers was a seaman and was able to calm them down by saying, "Leave the captain alone; he knows what he's doing. He's cutting into the waves this way and saving us from sinking." If he were not there, the boat might have sunk because the others were not letting the captain do his job the way he knew best.

You see, only one man was afraid but he created such a panic among the others on the boat that they could have sunk it. But then again, for such circumstances, there is

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always a second mechanic to take the helm if the first is in some way incapacitated.

Greeks are not easily disciplined. Roman Catholics rely on the infallibility of their Pope. We rely on our own thinking and imagine that we all have this infallibility! Why is it said that the Turks have good policy? Because few are the Turks with brains, while the majority of them are ignorant. Consequently, the capable few become leaders, and the others naturally follow and obey them. The Greeks, because virtually all of them are very intelligent, all want to govern, to give orders, and can be subdued only with great difficulty. The Italians used to say of us, "Out of ten Greeks, the five want to be in charge!"

Let us assume that we want to go somewhere. One person knows a shortcut, another knows a way round the other side of the mountain, and still another knows yet another best way to go. Each one starts insisting, "This is the way we must go." "No," says the other, "this is the better way to go." Finally, hours and days may pass without them getting started. They'll stay in the same place until one of them can give the order and the others follow. But if one can give the order and say, "This is the way we will go," even if it is the longer way, at least they will eventually get to their destination. Of course, if the one giving the order also knows the shorter way, this would be better. In any case, even if they take the longer road by obeying the command, they will still arrive.

God Sees the Good Intention and Helps

– If the times demand something extra, something more than the usual, and you don't have a developed

spiritual state but only a good intention, will you still be able to stand the strain?

– Of course you will. God sees the good intention and helps. Then again, quite often, during difficult times, people who do not seem to have any courage will demonstrate great bravery. I remember in the army a lieutenant who had never given a sign of sacrifice or bravery.

Once, when we were in danger of been captured by the guerrillas, he had taken position by a country Chapel and with one automatic weapon was able to pin them down while we retreated to safety. He stood his ground, and fired up and down, left and right, and did not allow them to pass. Finally, he left his post so we wouldn't see what he had done. Later, he never even boasted, "I delayed them so you could escape." We all said, "One automatic weapon saved us," and because we were saying it, he said it too. In the end, however, we realized who had been missing from the group at the critical time and understood who the hero who saved us was. If he had been captured, the enemy would have taken it out on him and tortured him most severely. A man of the world, and yet he made such a sacrifice! He sacrificed himself because he placed himself in greater danger than all of us.

Do you sacrifice yourselves like this? He had neither read the writings of the Fathers, nor did he know much about spiritual things. I knew him; he had a simplicity about him, a sense of honour. And there were others who would find a dead guerrilla, cut off his head, and parade around town with it to show how brave they were. That's why it's not enough to simply be brave, one must also have the spirit of sacrifice so that bravery can have an impact.

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Dangers Must Be Faced Spiritually

Readiness and bravery are needed during critical times. During the Occupation, the Italians would take four or five animals, come to our field and load them with melons. Once I told them, "We're keeping these melons for seed, take those over there." The Italian lifted up his whip and said, "Do you see this?" I took hold of the whip, looked at it and said, "Bene!" That is, it's a good whip, as if he had shown me his whip to see if I liked it. In that instant his anger broke, he laughed and went away.

I remember another incident during the guerrilla warfare. Two soldiers had gone to the fields, and asked the owner to let them eat some melons or a few tomatoes. They left their guns to one side and proceeded. As the owner saw them from a distance, he picked up his own gun to fire at them. In an instant, one of the soldiers picked a red tomato and shouted to the owner, "Put the gun down or I'll send this grenade flying right at you!" The owner put the gun down and went away.

– What quick-witted preparedness and bravery!

– Another soldier had hung his overcoat on a wild pear tree at a distance. Shortly after that, an armed guerrilla came down from the mountain and could have captured the soldier. Turning to his overcoat, he shouted, "Captain, what shall I do with this one?" And then, as if receiving a signal from the "captain", the soldier told the guerrilla, "Bring your weapon here!" He then grabbed the gun and disarmed him.

– Geronda, was the overcoat the "captain"?

– Yes, he was the overcoat. You see, he was alone, with only his overcoat and he succeeded in disarming

the guerrilla fighter. Using this technique, he was able to gather many weapons from the guerrilla fighters. It takes bravery!

I also remember a Russian monk on the Holy Mountain when thieves went to rob him. The moment the thieves were climbing the wall, he stood on the wall and shouted down to the thieves, "Do you want to have it with the six-shooter or the twelve-shooter!" The thieves ran off and never even looked back. Another monk, when thieves went to his cell to rob him, picked up a small frying pan and pretended to be making a telephone call, "Yes, yes, thieves are here at my cell..." The thieves, assuming he had called the police, went away.

Another time, again, a huge man had taken a shepherd by the neck and was trying to choke him. As the poor shepherd's eyes were stretched out in fear, his assailant asked, "Why are you looking at me with such wild eyes?" And the shepherd told him, "I'm looking to see which mountain peak I am going to throw you at." The assailant was frightened and left! That is why I say that we mustn't lose our cool at critical times. We must stay calm and let our brain think. Because, if the brain doesn't think, one simple foolish move can become an act of betrayal. No matter what is happening, we must pray, think and act. The best way is to try to face a difficult situation by spiritual means. But today, unfortunately, we lack both types of bravery, both the spiritual and the natural. Spiritual bravery is born out of sanctity and a boldness before God, that enables us to overcome a difficulty by spiritual means. Natural bravery helps us maintain our composure and avoid showing cowardice in time of danger. One must have much sanctity to prevent a great

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evil, otherwise where can he possibly find support? If even one soul in the monastery has spiritual bravery, he can stop anyone with evil intentions in his tracks – with one leg inside the wall and the other outside.[4] The enemy will be struck on the head with spiritual weapons, with the *komboschoini*, with the Jesus Prayer, and not with a pistol. He will pray a little, and the other will remain motionless outside! He will remain there as a guard! A soul in a spiritual state can hold evil at bay, help people and keep the monastery safe. The Myrrh-bearing women didn't worry about anything, because they were in a spiritual state and placed their trust in Christ. If they had not been in a spiritual state, what would they have trusted in to do what they did?

In the spiritual life even the most cowardly person can acquire great bravery, if he only places his trust in Christ, in divine help. Such a person can go to the front line and fight in a war and win. Whereas those poor people who want to harm others, even if they are brave, will be afraid because they are aware of their guilt and can only rely on their barbarism. The man of God has divine powers, and righteousness is on his side. You can see a little puppy bark at a wolf and the wolf goes away because it feels guilty. God has so planned things that even a wolf can be afraid of a little puppy, because it, too, has rights in the home of its master. Now, how much more afraid will be someone who seeks to harm a person who holds Christ in his soul! For this reason, let us only fear God, not men, no matter how evil they may be. Fear of God transforms

4. See Elder Paisios of Mount Athos, *Saint Arsenios the Cappadocian*, Souroti, Thessaloniki 2007, p. 117.

even the most cowardly person into a brave hero. The more we are united with God, the less we are afraid of anything.

God will help us in our difficulties. But for God to provide divine power, man must offer whatever little he has and can give.

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